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THE WINNING
OF THE SUDAN

THE WINNING OF THE SUDAN

By

PIERRE CRABITÈS

*Author of Gordon, the Sudan and Slavery,
Ismaïl, the Malignant Khedive, etc.*

With a Map



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P. C.

THE WINNING OF THE SUDAN

CHAPTER I

THE RETIREMENT FROM KHARTUM

THE fall of Khartum left Sir Charles Wilson and his heroic little band of Englishmen in dire straits. They had dashed forward from Gubat in the vain hope of bringing relief to Gordon. They had sought, a flying squad, to annihilate distance and to wipe out time in an endeavour to save the besieged Briton standing alone amid a sea of black faces. Ninety odd miles separated them from the advance guard of the British forces. Two Nile "penny steamers" carried this chosen few. Sir Charles Wilson was aboard the *Bordene*. With him were Captain Gascoigne, of the Yorkshire Hussars, ten non-commissioned officers and men of the Royal Sussex Regiment, and one petty officer of the Royal Navy. The *Talahawiyah* followed with Captain Trafford, ten non-commissioned officers and men of the Royal Sussex, Lieutenant Stuart-Wortley of the King's Royal Rifles, and one Naval petty officer. A small contingent of native officers, non-commissioned officers, and privates made up, with these twenty-six Englishmen, the entire strength of the expedition.¹

It was Gordon's personality that had held together the forces opposed to Muhammad Ahmad. As soon as he fell, all resistance to the Mahdi crumbled. This meant that the Dervish hordes could be concentrated against the two steamers; it also implied that the twenty-six English officers and men were menaced not only by the enemy but also by the possibility of treachery from the black troops on board the boats. And added to the perils of the British position was the

¹ *The Egyptian Campaigns, 1882 to 1885*, by Charles Royle, London, Hurst and Blackett (1886), p. 264.

fact that hazardous cataracts accentuated the risk of navigation on the return journey from Khartum to the army base at Gubat.

Sir Charles Wilson was placed in a doubly difficult position. He and Gordon had been not only brother officers, but personal friends.¹ "For months," wrote Wilson, "I had been looking forward to the time when I should meet Gordon again and tell him what everyone thought of his heroic defence of Khartum—it seemed too cruel to be true. I think I should have collapsed like Khashm El Mus if I had not had to think of getting the steamers down the cataracts, which I knew, from what the captains said coming up, would be a difficult if not dangerous business."²

The commanding officer suppressed the lump in his throat. He took a final glance at Khartum and, remembering that he was an Englishman, and that duty came before sentiment, gave the fateful order to steam northward. His decision was one of those nerve-destroying resolutions which the personal equation makes even more difficult. It was a courageous admission of failure, made all the more reluctantly since Wilson knew that he had not faltered. He was, nevertheless, conscious that in retracing his steps he was opening up a new chapter in history : and he was.

The Arabs on shore caught the significance of the command to retire. They opened fire upon the steamers. Wilson recorded in his diary on 28th January, 1885 :

"When we got clear of the last guns it was past four o'clock, so that for four hours we had been continuously engaged with the enemy's batteries ; luckily for us their gunners were such bad shots."³

If the Arab gunners were bad shots, some of their men knew how to aim. This is evident from Wilson's story :—

"We all had narrow escapes. I was struck above the knee by a spent shot which got through a weak point

¹ *From Korti to Khartum*, by Sir Charles Wilson, Edinburgh, William Blackwood and Son (1886), p. 181.

² *Ibid.*, p. 170.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

in the turret ; and my field-glass, an old friend of twenty-five years, sent out to me in America, was broken in my hand as I was resting it on the top of the turret. . . . The *Talahawiyah* was struck by a solid shot, and a shell, bursting just in front of the deck-house, sent in a shower of fragments which played much havoc with the fittings, but hurt no one. Another shell burst overhead.”¹

Darkness gave the Englishmen a respite from shot and shell ; but it accentuated the perils of their position. They could not navigate by night. They had to make fast to an island in midstream and wait for dawn, conscious that the Mahdists knew approximately where they were and could concentrate their forces for attack when the steamers came to the treacherous cascades. The wounded were looked after as soon as obscurity stopped the enemy fire. There were no medical men aboard, and the two English lieutenants did all that they could to meet the emergency. Fortunately there were no very severe cases, and, as Wilson put it, “the nigger is really like a bit of india-rubber.” As a result, everything was ready for an early start the next morning.

Kismet willed, however, that the steamers should not get away with the lark. The float of one of their paddles got loose, and the iron rod that held it was bent ; it took some time to straighten it. The result was that the clock registered seven before the boats got under way. An hour and a half later the *Bordene* struck a sand-bank. Half an hour was lost in getting her afloat. At eleven o'clock the cataracts were reached. The native captains felt the persuasive effect of pistols at their heads and steered their craft safely through the first zone of these dangerous passages only to run the *Talahawiyah* into a sunken rock as soon as the entrance into open water released the pressure of cold steel. This is how Wilson described what took place :—

“It appears that the rock lay in midstream in front of a sand-bank, and the accident was caused by a dispute between the captain and the *reis* as to which side of

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

the sand-bank they should take the steamer. The captain held up his hand one way, the *reis* the other, and the helmsman, puzzled what to do, kept on straight and hit the rock. I asked Trafford and Wortley whether they thought there had been any foul play ; and they both said that, as far as they could judge, it was a pure accident. Afterwards, however, events gave it a different appearance. The water rushed in quickly, and the steamer settled down between the two rocks. There was no panic.”¹

There was but one thing to do : to abandon the *Talahawiyah*. Trafford and Wortley managed to get the men, the two guns, the men’s arms, kit, rations, and some boxes of small-arm ammunition into the large *nuggar* they were towing, and before sunset they dropped down to the *Bordene*. All the gun ammunition and much of the small-arm ammunition were abandoned. No lives were lost. This was most fortunate, as the Dervishes fired on the boats and on the *nuggar* while the transfer was taking place. But the attack was more or less desultory.

It was not until evening that the mildness of the assault was explained. It appeared that the Mahdi felt that he could destroy the British force whenever he wanted and that he preferred to afford them an opportunity of embracing Islam before so doing. It thus came to pass that when night fell and the *Bordene* was tied up, Sir Charles Wilson was told that a messenger from the Mahdi wished to come on board with a letter from his chief. As the Englishman wanted to know what had happened at Khartum he determined to receive the man, and was “much struck by the quiet manner, the business-like way in which the herald performed his mission and his belief in the righteousness of the Mahdi’s cause”.

The letter was dated 11 Rabia II, 1302 (corresponding to 28th January, 1885). It began :—

“In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate. Praise be to the Bountiful Sovereign, and blessings be

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

upon our Lord Muhammad and on his family. From the servant who stands in the need of God, and on whom he places dependence, Muhammad the Mahdi, son of Abdullah, to the British and Shagiyah officers, and their followers : God direct them to the truth. Surrender and you will be spared. Do not disobey, else you will rue it. And I will briefly inform you, perchance God Almighty may put you upon the path of the righteous. Know thou that the city of Khartum and its surroundings are like the garrison of a stronghold ; God has destroyed it and other places by our hands ; nothing can withstand His power and might ; and by the bounty of God all has come into our hands."

And, as if to show that he knew that he could destroy the little British force whenever he wanted, the Mahdi added :—

"As you have become a small remnant, like a leaflet, within our grasp, two alternatives are offered to you. If you surrender and prevent the shedding of your blood and the blood of God's creatures who are under your leadership, well and good : grace and security from God and His Prophet and security from us will be upon you. But if you do not believe what we have said, and desire to ascertain the truth of the killing of Gordon, send a special envoy on your part to see the truth of what we say : and to your envoy is given the security of God and His Prophet, till he comes to us and sees and returns under a guard from us, to see and to be warned of God."

The letter then offered Wilson and his followers the hand of fellowship if they would accept the faith of Muhammad the Prophet. It ended with this practical admonition :—

"Do not be deceived and put confidence in your steamers and other things, and delay deciding until you rue it ; but rather hasten to your benefit and profit before your wings are cut. Much reasoning will not convert ; for it is God who converts, and He who lets go astray, and thou wilt find no ruler over Him.

What has been said is enough for him who has been reached by Providence."¹

With the frankness characteristic of an English gentleman, Wilson at once declined to reply to the letter. But the Shagiyah officers looked at the matter from a different angle. They pointed out that the communication was courteous in form and called for an answer. They also urged that the more dangerous cataracts had not yet been traversed, and that military exigencies required that advantage should be taken of the opportunity that Allah had placed in their hands when He inspired the Mahdi to send such a missive. And, to clinch the matter, Khashm El Mus, the native whose name has already been mentioned, offered to go and survey the field under Muhammad Ahmad's safe-conduct. He further brought out the fact that before he could get back the *Bordene* would have traversed the cataracts and have passed beyond certain perilous turns in the Nile. He therefore emphasized the necessity of giving such an answer as would gain valuable time.

"I could not help seeing that the slightest opposition in the cataracts would be fatal to us, and felt deeply the responsibility I was under for the safety of all those on board ; but for a long time I could not consent to such an answer being sent," wrote Wilson. "At last, however," he continued, "feeling sure of Khashm, who was too deeply compromised with the Mahdi to give himself up, and believing that by holding pistols to the captains' heads we could force them to run full speed past the battery, as Khashm El Mus promised to do, I allowed him to send any answer he wished, on condition that we English were not implicated in the ruse."²

Wilson did not see the letter that Khashm wrote. While it was being prepared the Mahdi's messenger told the British officers that Khartum had been taken without fighting, but that the garrison on Tuti, opposite that city, having refused to submit, had been put to the sword. He made the significant statement that the Mahdi was going to Cairo, then to Stambul, Rome, and

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

² *Ibid.*, p. 190.

eventually to overrun all countries. Wortley remarked that that would take a long time. The Arab neatly replied that time was no object—they could wait any number of years. And, having thus made clear to his hearers, but without any braggadocio, the world-wide mission of his Master and the peril which immediately menaced England and Egypt, he exhorted the Englishmen to become Muslims and no longer attempt to oppose the irresistible power of the Mahdi.

While the visit of Muhammad Ahmad's messenger assured the little band a peaceful night, daybreak was welcome. Preparations were made for descending another bad stretch of the cataracts. The *Bordene* was lightened by throwing overboard every ounce of food-stuff that could be spared, for the most critical waters were ahead and a strong wind was blowing. There were moments when disaster appeared imminent. There were seconds when even hope was lost, but a cool head, the hypnotic influence of a trigger held by a steady finger, and propitious fate steered the "penny" man-of-war to safety. The Shagiyah officers and men played their part in the nerve-racking ordeal, encouraged no doubt to remain loyal by the fact that word had drifted to them during the night that the English had taken Metamma, near Gubat, "and were swarming across the desert like ants."¹

On the morning of 31st January the *Bordene* began the descent of the last narrow "gate" or passage of the cataracts. The persuasion of firearms again produced happy results. Wilson and his fellow-officers had, however, barely finished congratulating themselves on their good fortune, and had just begun to speculate on their chances of running past an approaching battery without serious injury, when the steamer ran on a sunken rock with a crash that shook everybody. A hurried inspection told the fateful tale. "It's all up; we are wrecked and the ship is sinking fast," announced the commanding officer. They were then alongside a sand-spit, which turned out to be the end of a small

¹ Ibid., p. 199.

wooded islet about 50 yards from the larger island of Mernat. And quick as a flash officers and men, whites and blacks, were landing the guns, ammunition, and stores.

An immediate reconnaissance convinced Wilson that both the small wooded islet and the larger island were unsuited for defence purposes. He therefore decided to make a forced march down the right bank by moonlight with the Sussex and Sudanese soldiers and to send a *nuggar* with the sailors and a small guard. He had in the meantime ordered Wortley to pick out the best boat and boat's crew he could find, and have everything ready to start for Gubat as soon as it was dark. Instructions were given that officer to explain the situation, the fall of Khartum, the two wrecks, and the fact that Wilson was going to march down the river and desired that a steamer should be sent up to meet and support him.

It requires no stretch of imagination to picture the perilous position of these two groups of Englishmen. They were but twenty-six all told. They were surrounded by enemies. They had grave reasons for doubting the loyalty of the blacks who accompanied them. They were now forced to separate into two units. One had to face the uncertainties of a long march through hostile lands ; the other was called upon to brave the mysterious Nile, conscious of the fact that discovery meant death or an imprisonment that was worse than death.

Wilson thus described the initial difficulties with which he was confronted :—

“When the order was given to prepare to start, we could get no one to move. The officers were worse than useless, and the men, in spite of a little kurbashing, would not, or perhaps could not, help us. The blacks had lighted fires, and were cooking unsavoury messes, from which nothing could tear them. I saw at once that it would be near midnight before we could reach the mainland and make a fair start ; and that we should the next morning be in a hostile country, over twenty miles from Gubat. Besides, the men appeared to have

become much demoralized by the events of the last few days. They and their officers were in a state of collapse, and I did not know how far I could depend upon their loyalty.¹ I therefore decided to remain where we were, and had just time to let Wortley know the change of plan before he started."²

Lieutenant Wortley left at 6.45 in the evening. It was quite dark. His crew consisted of four English soldiers and eight natives. They rowed down the river until they reached a point near Wad Habashi. The Mahdists were known to have a battery at that place. Wortley's orders were to float past the danger-spot. They came so close to the shore that the Lieutenant could hear the Arabs discussing whether they saw a boat or not. Just then the moon rose. The enemy caught sight of them and fired three volleys. The boat was, however, already below the battery and, in a few moments, out of danger. As soon as he perceived that he had been sighted, Wortley gave orders to take to the oars once more and to row for dear life. The soldiers did so. In fact, the men in the boat worked so well that they reached Gubat the next day at three in the morning.

While Wortley found encouragement in his effort to wipe out space, Wilson, Gascoigne, and Trafford were glued to one spot. They had no relaxation for their pent-up nerves. They knew that treachery stalked around them and that enemies surrounded them. But they could do nothing but await the dawn and keep a ceaseless vigil.

The first thing that they did on the morning of 1st February was to move the entire detachment, except a guard of twenty natives, to the larger island. The Nile had fallen very low, leaving a steep, almost inaccessible bank, from 25 to 30 feet high, along the top of which ran a thicket of low bush two or three yards wide, except at one spot, where there was a fairly easy

¹ A court of inquiry was held at Gubat to investigate the charges of treachery made against the two captains and one of the *Reis* of the wrecked steamers. The *Reis* was condemned to death but recommended to mercy on account of having brought down Wortley in the boat.

² *Ibid.*, p. 208.

descent to the river. It was there that they landed. A rude path was soon made by the men carrying up the guns and stores. The line of bush acted as a good screen from the enemy's riflemen on the left bank of the stream. Here Wilson determined to build a temporary fortification which he called a *zeriba*.

The only man upon whom he could depend, apart from the Englishmen, was an Egyptian named Ibrahim, who had fought against the British at Tel-el-Kebir. He had been the friend of Arabi. He was "a small man. Of curious appearance, with large projecting eyes, a cool manner unusual in an Oriental, and a persuasive tongue, coupled with a way of making himself ubiquitous which was really remarkable".¹ He had proved his pluck at Abu Klea and Metamma, and had shown himself so attached to his commanding officer that Wilson felt certain of his loyalty. It was upon this man that the British officers largely depended "to control a lot of wild Sudanese", while the Englishmen were busily engaged in buttressing their position.

The 1st February and the next day passed with no untoward incident, though every hour increased the risk of treachery from within and added to the danger of attack from without. Finally, when 3rd February had not yet reached its eighth hour, the report of a gun downstream was heard. The effect was electrical. There was a general shout of "Ingliz ! Ingliz !" Everyone's spirits rose a hundred per cent. Confidence replaced despondency. A man was sent up a high tree. He screamed down that he could see a steamer—it might be two—keeping up a fire on the fort. Gascoigne then hurried over to the wreck to hoist flags on the *Bordene* so as to show their exact position. This awoke the enemy on the left bank from their lethargy, and they opened fire on the *zeriba*. The besieged replied with their Remingtons. The result of all this firing was that Trafford soon reported that he had seen a steamer, enveloped in smoke, and that he feared that she had met with a serious accident. Wilson, on the other hand,

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

had observed a steamer swinging at anchor and keeping up her fire on the battery.

It was impossible for the Englishmen on shore to make out what had happened. It appeared as if one boat had been crippled and the other had anchored to engage the battery and draw off the fire from her consort. But it was certainty that was needed. Wilson therefore determined to break up the *zeriba* and march at once down the right bank so as to effect a junction with the men on the steamer. He felt sure that whatever had occurred there the united forces would be a match for the enemy.

No time was lost in executing this decision. When the marching column came opposite the steamer it was seen that she was anchored and that something had gone wrong with her machinery. She soon began to signal. She was the *Safia*, and alone. Her message read that she had been hit in the boiler, but that the damage could be repaired before morning. She was under the command of Lord Charles Beresford. A rendezvous was fixed for the next day, and Wilson and his party *zeribaed* for the night. It was bitterly cold, and nobody slept a wink.

As daylight approached on 4th February it was still distressingly chilly, and there was little to warm anybody in the frugal breakfast of "corn-cobs" and Nile water. All eyes were turned towards Wad Habashi. The increasing light just enabled the little band to see the *Safia* when the first shot was heard. For a few moments the firing was continuous. Above the sound could be heard the sharp grunt of the Gardner, which told that the steamer was responding nobly. A few seconds later she was under way in midstream and still keeping up her fire on the battery. After some tense moments she had run the gauntlet of danger and was safe. Hurrying to her point of rendezvous she picked up Wilson, his comrades and men, white and black, and at 5.30 the same afternoon reached Gubat.¹

¹ Ibid., p. 261.

CHAPTER II

THE RETREAT OF THE DESERT COLUMN

"THERE are probably few more gallant achievements recorded," wrote one of the earlier historians of the Egyptian campaigns, "than the able and successful attempt at rescue made by Lord Charles Beresford in the face of overwhelming difficulties, and his exploits on this occasion only added to his deservedly high reputation for courage, perseverance, and fertility of resource."¹ No one who is conversant with the situation will gainsay this temperate praise of an outstanding achievement. And yet the fact remains that in joining forces with Sir Charles Wilson and in accompanying that gallant officer to Gubat, Beresford, in doing all that was humanly possible, did not lead his fellow-officer to a haven of safety.

With fanatical Dervishes, intoxicated by success, surrounding them on all sides; with the fortified stronghold of Metamma held by a superior force but a few miles away; and with the Mahdi able to press forward at any moment from Khartum, the position of the British at Gubat was most precarious. But in war, as in science, relativity plays a part. Wilson was undoubtedly relatively more secure at Gubat than he had been at any time since he had turned his back upon Khartum. There were, however, but 922 men all told at Gubat,² and this little garrison contained several companies of Sudanese. The Arabs at Metamma numbered between 2,000 and 3,000.³ Rumour had it that Muhammad Ahmad, at the head of 50,000 men, was heading for Gubat. It was obvious, therefore, that Wilson's position still remained extremely precarious.

Colonel Boscawen had taken over command of the

¹ Royle, *op. cit.*, ii. 274.

² *Ibid.*, p. 264.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

garrison while the flying squad had sought to reach Khartum. The intervening time had been spent in strengthening the defences at Gubat. A triangular fort had been erected, and earthworks with flanking trenches and parapets had been thrown up both on the land side and towards Metamma. Brushwood and wire entanglements had been placed outside to impede the enemy in the event of an attempt being made to storm the place. Everything, in fact, had been done to prepare for a siege. But such activity meant nothing if the Mahdi massed his legions and was willing to see his men mowed down in order to force his way to victory.

Not only was the small force at Gubat in extreme and obvious danger, but the sole quarter from which Sir Charles Wilson could hope for aid was General Wolseley's main army. This, unfortunately, was divided and split up into fragments. One of these was Wilson's own command. The other was isolated near Kirbekan, where the enemy were reported to be in considerable strength. A third remained with Lord Wolseley at headquarters at Korti, some two hundred miles away. There were also detachments scattered across the Bayuda desert.¹ It was no faulty strategy that produced these results. They were brought about by the desire to hasten the arrival of the expeditionary force at Khartum. The fact, however, stood out that after the death of Gordon and the retirement of the relief expedition from his former capital new conditions obtained, and the British force at Gubat was in dire peril.

This desert column—so called because it had marched across the sands from Korti to the Nile, instead of following the river route as did the main force—had originally been under the command of General Sir Herbert Stewart, who had fallen mortally wounded on 22nd January, 1885. Colonel Sir Charles Wilson had temporarily assumed the leadership, but, during his absence, General Sir Redvers Buller had been designated to succeed Stewart. The latter had left Korti on the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

29th January to assume his new duties. With him came six companies of the Royal Irish Regiment. The convoy, with General Buller at its head, reached Gubat on 11th February, just one week after Wilson's arrival.

These reinforcements, important though they were, did not alter the fundamental fact that the garrison was in jeopardy and that every day's delay accentuated the peril of its position. General Buller's original instructions were to seize Metamma and march on to Berber. That was the proper course so long as Gordon lived and the Egyptian flag floated over the capital of the Sudan ; but new conditions were created by the enforced retirement of Colonel Sir Charles Wilson from Khartum. The realities of life had to be faced. Lord Wolseley faced them with a courage worthy of the best traditions of the British Army ; but, after all, he was but the agent of Her Majesty's Government, and had to follow the orders given him by London.

As soon as the news of the fall of Khartum had reached Cairo, Sir Evelyn Baring, afterwards Lord Cromer, then British Diplomatic Agent and Consul-General at Cairo, telegraphed to his Sovereign's Foreign Office :—

"It is too early to express any opinion worth having as to the effect which the fall of Khartum will produce in Egypt proper. Moreover, much will no doubt depend on the course which Her Majesty's Government now decide to pursue in the Sudan. But I may say that, so far as I can at present judge, I do not anticipate any disturbance so far as the Egyptian population is concerned. The effect produced upon the Bedwins on the frontier is more difficult to forecast, and it would be as well to be prepared to send at short notice another battalion to Asswan as proposed some little time ago by Wolseley."¹

When this message reached London the British Government were in a position of great difficulty. The primary object of the expedition had been to bring General Gordon and Colonel Stewart away from Khartum. This result had not been attained. Obviously,

¹ *Modern Egypt*, by the Earl of Cromer, London, Macmillan (1908), ii, 19.

unless the policy of London were to undergo a complete change, its most logical course would have been to desist from any further interference in the Sudan, to withdraw the British troops to some good strategical position in the Valley of the Nile, and there to await the attacks of the Mahdist forces. This was what was eventually done. But in February, 1885, both the British nation and the British army were smarting under a sense of failure. The soldiers were burning to avenge their comrades and to show the Dervishes that they were no match for English troops. It was certain that the fall of Khartum would increase the influence and prestige of the Mahdi. It was impossible to foresee what might be the effect of his success on the millions of Muhammadan subjects of the British Crown.

It will be recalled that Muhammad Ahmad's messenger had told Sir Charles Wilson that the Mahdi was "going to Cairo, then to Stambul, Rome, and eventually to overrun all countries". Lord Wolseley was convinced that Gordon's conqueror would attempt to capitalize his prestige and seek to drive England out of Egypt, and he deprecated the adoption of a defensive policy. "It must never be forgotten," he said, "that the question of whether this war shall or shall not go on does not rest with us, unless we are prepared to give up Egypt to the False Prophet. We shall not bring about a quiet state of affairs by adopting a defensive policy. The Mahdi has repeatedly declared it to be his intention to possess himself of Egypt, and his followers look upon themselves as engaged in a war the object of which is not to rest contented with the capture of Berber, but to drive the infidels into the sea."

Lord Wolseley was not alone in the stand he took. The British Government had to face a strong body of public opinion favourable to offensive action. As soon as Queen Victoria had heard that Khartum had fallen and that Gordon was dead she sent to Gladstone, then Prime Minister, and to Lord Hartington, then Secretary of State for War, an angry telegram, blaming her Ministers for what had happened—a telegram not in

cipher, as usual, but open.¹ It may not be amiss to print Gladstone's reply to this royal criticism. It is somewhat lengthy, but it enables us to understand what the Prime Minister had to say. It is dated 5th February, and reads as follows :—

“ To the Queen.

“ Mr. Gladstone has had the honour this day to receive your Majesty's telegram *en clair*, relating to the deplorable intelligence received this day from Lord Wolseley, and stating that it is too fearful to consider that the fall of Khartum might have been prevented and many precious lives saved by earlier action. Mr. Gladstone does not presume to estimate the means of judgment possessed by your Majesty, but so far as his information and recollection at the moment go, he is not altogether able to follow the conclusion which your Majesty has been pleased thus to announce. Mr. Gladstone is under the impression that Lord Wolseley's force might have been sufficiently advanced to save Khartum, had not a large portion of it been detached by a circuitous route along the river, upon the express application of General Gordon, to occupy Berber on the way to the final destination. He speaks, however, with submission on a point of this kind. There is indeed in some quarters a belief that the river route ought to have been chosen at an earlier period, and had the navigation of the Nile in its upper region been as well known as that of the Thames, this might have been a just ground of reproach. But when, on the first symptoms that the position of General Gordon at Khartum was not secure, your Majesty's advisers at once sought from the most competent persons the best information they could obtain respecting the Nile route, the balance of testimony and authority was decidedly against it, and the idea of the Suakin and Berber route, with all its formidable difficulties, was entertained in preference ; nor was it until a much later period that the weight of opinion and information warranted the definitive choice of the Nile route. Your

¹ *Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, by John Morley, London, Macmillan (1911), ii, 407.

Majesty's ministers were well aware that climate and distance were far more formidable than the sword of the enemy, and they deemed it right, while providing adequate military means, never to lose from view what might have proved to be the destruction of the gallant army in the Soudan. It is probable that abundant wrath and indignation will on this occasion be poured out upon them. Nor will they complain if so it should be ; but a partial consolation may be found on reflecting that neither aggressive policy, nor military disaster, nor any gross error in the application of means to ends, has marked this series of difficult proceedings, which, indeed, have greatly redounded to the honour of your Majesty's forces of all ranks and arms. In these remarks, which Mr. Gladstone submits with his humble devotion, he has taken it for granted that Khartum has fallen through the exhaustion of its means of defence. But your Majesty may observe from the telegram that this is uncertain. Both the correspondent's account and that of Major Wortley refer to the delivery of the town by treachery, a contingency which on some previous occasions General Gordon has treated as far from improbable ; and which, if the notice existed, was likely to operate quite independently of the particular time at which a relieving force might arrive. The presence of the enemy in force would naturally suggest the occasion, or perhaps even the apprehension of the approach of the British army. In pointing to these considerations, Mr. Gladstone is far from assuming that they are conclusive upon the whole case ; in dealing with which the government has hardly ever at any of its stages been furnished sufficiently with those means of judgment which rational men usually require. It may be that, on a retrospect, many errors will appear to have been committed. There are many reproaches, from the most opposite quarters, to which it might be difficult to supply a conclusive answer. Among them, and perhaps among the most difficult, as far as Mr. Gladstone can judge, would be the reproach of those who might argue that our proper business was the protection of Egypt, that it never was in military

danger from the Mahdi, and that the most prudent course would have been to provide it with adequate frontier defences, and to assume no responsibility for the lands beyond the desert.”¹

This reply, however interesting it may be as an attempted justification of the attitude of the Gladstone Cabinet towards the Gordon mission, did not deal with the situation created by the fall of Khartum. Gladstone had purposely refrained from committing himself upon that momentous question. “The Ministers hesitated,” to quote Lord Cromer, “and they might well do so, for they were asked to embark on a crusade against Muhammadan fanaticism, to adopt an adventurous policy of which no one could foresee the end, and to wage a costly war in a remote country under conditions of exceptional difficulty imposed by the climate, by the scantiness of local supplies, and by the absence of facilities for transport and locomotion.” Lord Wolseley had warned the Cabinet that—

“the strength and composition of his little army was calculated for the relief, not for the siege and capture of Khartum, the two operations being entirely different in character and magnitude. Khartum in the hands of the enemy could not be retaken until the force under his command had been largely augmented in numbers and in artillery.”²

Whatever the Government may or may not have thought about the points thus made by Lord Wolseley, the duty devolved upon them to decide what was to be done. Their first instructions were issued on 6th February. They were “to check the advance of the Mahdi in districts now undisturbed”. “Whether,” it was added, “it will be ultimately necessary to advance on Khartum or not, cannot now be decided.” At the same time Sir Evelyn Baring was told to give the Khedive general assurances of support and to inform Lord Wolseley that it was the desire of the Cabinet “that if the Mahdi should make any proposals he should transmit them immediately to Her Majesty’s Government for their consideration”.

¹ *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

² Cromer, *op. cit.*, ii, 27.

Lord Wolseley, with a soldier's directness, replied upon receipt of these instructions that Lord Hartington's telegram gave him "no information as to the policy with reference to the Sudan which Her Majesty's Government meant to pursue". He was not afraid of responsibility, but he wanted to be certain whether orders had or had not been given to him. Thus pressed, London answered on 9th February: "Your military policy is to be based on the necessity which we recognize on the statement of facts now before us, that the power of the Mahdi at Khartum must be overthrown." This answer received a reply from Lord Wolseley thanking Lord Hartington for "his explicit statement of policy" and adding, "I am sure it is the correct one, as the Mahdi's power is incompatible with good government in Egypt."¹

This exchange of telegrams looked ahead. It did not apply to the morrow: it referred to the more distant future. It fixed, not the immediate operations of Lord Wolseley's army, but its eventual objective, for that officer then knew that an immediate advance on Khartum was out of the question. Time was required for the necessary reinforcements to come out from England. The Nile was getting lower every day. The hot season was approaching. Temporary expedients in the field and methodical preparations behind the lines were, therefore, the order of the day. Lord Wolseley, accordingly, determined to capture Berber and Abu Hamed by a combined movement of the forces of Sir Redvers Buller and General Earle, the latter commanding what was known as the River column. The purpose was to hold those places during the summer preparatory to an advance on Khartum during the ensuing cool season. At the same time a force was to co-operate from Suakin on the Red Sea with a view to keeping open the desert road from that port to the Nile. "The sooner," Lord Wolseley telegraphed to Lord Hartington, "you can deal with Osman Digna the better."²

¹ Ibid., p. 22.

² Ibid., loc. cit.

In order to give effect to this strategy Sir Redvers Buller was ordered, on 10th February, to take Metamma "as soon as he felt himself strong enough to do so", and then to combine with General Earle for an attack on Berber. But fate played cruel pranks with these orders. Buller's instructions did not reach him until late on 13th February. Driven to act by the seriousness of his position at Gubat and threatened as he was by annihilation by the Mahdi, he had already begun his retirement when these directions came into his hands. Lord Wolseley's orders were couched in terms which gave his subordinate a wide measure of discretion. General Buller accordingly felt that it was his duty to continue his retrograde movement. His course was subsequently approved by his chief.

In the meantime General Earle, who was to co-operate with Sir Redvers Buller, had lost his life on 10th February, in the successful battle of Kirbeka.¹ The place of the dead commander was at once taken by General Brackenbury. The price that had been paid for this victory, however, coupled with the conditions that had forced General Buller to retire from Gubat, emphasized the necessity for extreme caution. And after all, as General Wolseley had no intention of making an immediate dash for Khartum, his strategy called, not for the capture of a specific objective, but for the choice of a suitable base from which to spring upon the enemy at the proper moment.

This does not mean that General Earle's death arrested the onward march of his forces. On the contrary, the British Army is a gigantic impersonal machine which always has an understudy prepared to fill every important part. General Brackenbury, true to tradition, held his colours aloft and continued his forward movement. On 24th February, when his column was about 30 miles from Abu Hamed, his first objective, he received a message from Lord Wolseley informing him of the retreat of the desert unit. "I have," Lord Wolseley said, "abandoned

¹ *Mahdism and the Egyptian Sudan*, by Major F. R. Wingate, London, Macmillan (1891), p. 200.

all hope of going to Berber before the autumn campaign begins." General Brackenbury was therefore ordered to withdraw his force to Merawi. He arrived there on 5th March.¹

While these operations were going on in the Nile Valley, Sir Gerald Graham was appointed to the chief command of the forces of the Red Sea district. This expedition had been planned in order to crush Osman Digna, occupy the Hadendowa country, make a railway as far as Ariab, and then prepare for the opening of the Suakin-Berber road (the Red Sea to the Nile Road) which could be effected when the Nile column had captured Berber.²

Sir Gerald Graham proved worthy of the trust reposed in him. Operating from Suakin, he first drove the Dervish forces out of Hashin, a centre held by them within a few miles of that Red Sea port. His next step was to crush the main Mahdist army in the vicinage, then concentrated at Tamai. A preliminary battle was fought at a spot named Tofrik, also near Suakin. The fighting was fast and furious. The Dervish losses in killed ran up to some 1,500. The British suffered quite heavily. Fifteen officers and 278 non-commissioned officers and men were killed, wounded, or missing. Shortly after this engagement Osman Digna withdrew his forces from Tamai, which was occupied by Sir Gerald Graham on 3rd April.

This victory made it possible to begin the construction of the Suakin-Berber railway. But on 15th April orders were issued from London to suspend this work. Suakin, however, was "to be held for the present, as also any position in the neighbourhood necessary for protection from constant attacks as last year".³

Higher politics dictated this right-about-face movement. While British strategy was being deployed and British blood spilt to carry through the plans outlined by Lord Hartington, when he telegraphed, as we have said above, to Lord Wolseley on 9th February, that

¹ Cromer, *op. cit.*, ii, 24.

² Wingate, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

³ Cromer, *op. cit.*, ii, 25.

"the power of the Mahdi must be overthrown", the Cabinet decided to reverse its own ruling and to adopt a new orientation of policy. It may be well to refer to Lord Morley's *Life of Gladstone* and there trace the genesis, evolution, and crystallization of this new programme. We learn from that Bible of Liberalism that when the news of the fall of Khartum reached England on 5th February, "one of the least points, as Mr. Gladstone wrote on that day, was that the grievous news would put an end to the government, and so it nearly did. As was to be expected, Sir Stafford Northcote moved a vote of censure. Mr. Gladstone informed the Queen on the day before the division, that the aspect of the House was 'dubious and uncertain'. . . . The division was taken at four in the morning (28th February) and the result was that the Government, which had come in with dazzling radiance five years ago, was worn down to an attenuated majority of fourteen."¹

When the numbers were declared, Mr. Gladstone said to a colleague on the bench, "*That will do.*" Whether this Delphic utterance meant that the size of the majority would justify resignation or retention his hearer was not sure. But the morrow solved the mystery. It disclosed that the Prime Minister preferred to remain at the helm. "At this moment," continues Lord Morley, "clouds began to darken the remote horizon of our great Indian possessions. The entanglement in the deserts of the Sudan was an obvious temptation to any other Power with policies of its own to disregard the susceptibilities or even the solid interests of Great Britain. . . . As early as 12th March the Cabinet found it necessary to consider the menacing look of things on the Afghan frontier."

Three or four weeks later these conditions came to a head. The question put by Mr. Gladstone to his colleagues was: "Does there appear to be any obligation of honour or any inducement of policy that should lead us in the present state of the demands on the empire to waste a large portion of our army in fighting against

¹ Morley, *op. cit.*, ii, 416.

nature, and I fear also against liberty (such liberty as the case admits) in the Sudan?"

The Queen "was rather vehement against withdrawal".¹ She took the position that the fullest powers should be granted to those on the spot. Her attitude brought forth another note from Mr. Gladstone. It was dated 15th March, and addressed to Sir Henry Ponsonby, but was really intended for Queen Victoria. It said:—

"Sir Evelyn Baring was appointed to carry onwards a declared and understood policy in Egypt, when all share in the management of the Sudan was beyond our province. To Lord Wolseley as general of the forces in Egypt, and on account of the arduous character of the work before him, we are bound to render in all military matters a firm and ungrudging support. We have accordingly not scrupled to counsel, on his recommendation, very heavy charges on the country, and military operations of the highest importance. But we have no right to cast on him any responsibility beyond what is strictly military."

This memorandum said nothing in regard to Sir Evelyn Baring's attitude. Mr. Gladstone, perhaps, did not know what that diplomatist then thought of the policy of withdrawal. This, because we read in *Modern Egypt*:—

"On 3rd April I wrote a private letter to Lord Granville in which, after dwelling on the ambiguity of Mr. Gladstone's statement in the House of Commons, I urged the necessity of facing the facts and of laying down some definite Sudan policy for the future. I concluded in the following words: 'The main question which I have propounded in this letter is as follows: Do the English Government intend to establish a settled form of government or not?' My own opinion is that this question should be answered in the negative. Hence, I am of the opinion that the military decision to advance on Khartum should be reversed and that no such advance should take place."²

When Mr. Gladstone was able to learn from this letter where Sir Evelyn Baring stood upon the question

¹ Ibid., p. 419.

² Cromer, *op. cit.*, ii, 27.

he was in a position to give explicit expression to his thoughts. The Cabinet, following his lead, "decided to retire from the Sudan and to fix the southern frontier of Egypt at the line where it was left for twelve years, until apprehension of designs of another European power on the upper waters of the Nile was held to demand a new policy."¹ It was, accordingly, announced in both Houses of Parliament on 21st April that it was not intended to advance on Khartum or to undertake any further offensive operations in the Sudan. Lord Wolseley was instructed to give effect to this decision.

¹ Merley, *op. cit.*, ii, 420.

CHAPTER III

EVACUATION OF DONGOLA

ALTHOUGH Lord Morley wrote with dogmatic finality the words we have just quoted, matters did not take this shape quite as automatically as the author of the *Life of Gladstone* seems to suggest. As we have already said, Queen Victoria was strongly opposed to the retirement of the British troops from the Sudan. Lord Wolseley shared his Sovereign's point of view ; but he was too much of a soldier to thrust his opinions upon the Cabinet. He gave expression to them because the Secretary for War telegraphed him on 13th April as follows :—

“ In the condition of Imperial affairs it is probable that the expedition to Khartum may have to be abandoned, and the troops brought back as soon as possible to Egypt. Consider at once what measures should, in that case, be promptly taken for safe withdrawal of troops. This would involve stopping advance from Suakin but not hurried withdrawal.”¹

This was obviously an invitation for an expression of opinion, at all events, in regard to the strategic position that should be taken by the English forces after the abandonment of the expedition to Khartum ; and it was in this sense that Lord Wolseley construed it. He cabled the next day that in the event of the Government determining to withdraw the troops he must know whether it was intended to retain Dongola, Wady Halfa, Korosko, or Asswan as the frontier post. He added that if the position on the southern frontier of Egypt was to be exclusively one of defence, he would hold Wady Halfa and Korosko as outposts with a strong brigade at Asswan.

On 15th April Lord Wolseley supplemented this message by another telegram in which he strongly

¹ Royle, *op. cit.*, ii, 360.

advised the retention of Dongola. Part of his despatch, which was quite lengthy, read :—

“Retreat from Dongola hands that province over to the Mahdi and renders loyalty of Ababdahs and other frontier tribes doubtful. Many circumstances may lead to his sudden disappearance ; time is a great element in our favour if we rest on our arms where we are. . . . Withdraw Graham’s force if necessary ; this will not seriously disturb Egypt ; but hold on to Dongola province.”¹

This telegram received the reply that “decision will probably be to adopt proposal for defence of Egyptian frontier at Wady Halfa and Asswan. . . . We do not contemplate indefinite retention of British troops at Dongola, and do not insist on precipitate retirement from any particular point ”.¹

When Lord Wolseley read this message it took all of that imperturbability which tradition and training ingrain in British officers for him to refrain from denouncing the Gladstone Cabinet. We do not know what he may have said to his intimates. All that can be affirmed is that on 16th April he forwarded to London a very able despatch which commands attention. It read in part :—

“Both from a military and a financial point of view, and also with regard to the general well-being of Egypt proper, the growing power of the Mahdi must be met not by a purely defensive policy on the frontier, whether at Asswan or Wady Halfa, but by his overthrow in the neighbourhood of Khartum.”

Having laid down this predicate, the gallant officer added :—

“The task of destroying the Mahdi’s power and influence might be effected in two ways, either by pursuing the original plan of advancing and destroying his power in the neighbourhood of Khartum or by adopting a purely defensive attitude on the frontier of Egypt. The first is an operation of which one can see the end. . . . The second course would result in a long

¹ Ibid., p. 361.

series of petty operations, almost certainly winding up with a war as serious as that now before us."

Lord Wolseley concluded by saying :—

"To sum up. The struggle with the Mahdi, or perhaps with Mahdism, must come sooner or later. We can accept it now and have done with it once and for all, or we can allow all the reputation we have gained at the cost of so much toil and hard fighting, all the bloodshed and all the expenditure of the past campaign, to go for nothing, and try and stave the final struggle off for a few years. These years will be years of trouble and disturbance for Egypt, of burden and strain to our military resources, and the contest that will come in the end will be no less than is in front of us now. That is all we shall gain by a defensive policy."¹

There is the ring of prophecy in this despatch. But it did not convert the Gladstone Ministry. Lord Hartington may, perhaps, have been impressed by its forceful language. But whether he was or not, he telegraphed to Lord Wolseley on 20th April that—

"the Government were about to announce that it was necessary to hold all the military resources of the Empire, including the forces in the Sudan, available for service wherever required. The Government would not, therefore, make provision for further offensive operations in the Sudan, or for military preparations for an early advance on Khartum, beyond such as could be stopped with advantage and did not involve hostile action, viz. river steamboats contracted for, and the completion of the Wady Halfa railway. . . . But as Suakin must be held for the present, it might be necessary to occupy one or more stations in the neighbourhood."²

The stout opposition shown by Lord Wolseley to the abandonment of Dongola province prompted Sir Evelyn Baring to take up the subject with General Buller and Colonel Wilson. Baring, though known to fame as Lord Cromer, the diplomatist and creator of Modern Egypt, had begun life as a Royal Artillery officer. He had remained a soldier long enough to become a Major.

¹ Ibid., p. 136.

² Ibid., p. 362.

He was therefore fully able to follow the reasoning of Lord Wolseley. The opinion of the two experts he consulted was dated 1st May. It was that "the evacuation of Dongola would give new life to the Mahdi". Sir Charles Wilson went even further, adding that "the control of the Sudan was necessary to Egypt, and that if abandoned now, it would have to be reconquered within ten years."

Even though the Gladstone Cabinet had advised both Houses of Parliament on 21st April that "it was not intended to advance on Khartum or to undertake any further offensive operations in the Sudan", Sir Evelyn Baring felt that it was his duty to take a decided stand against retirement from Dongola. Putting his views on record with that clearness and that courage so characteristic of him, he telegraphed the Foreign Office that—

"he most earnestly hoped that Her Majesty's Government would reconsider this portion of their policy. He believed it would be by far the wisest plan to determine to remain at and around Dongola for six months, or perhaps till the end of the year."

And, ever constructive in his statesmanship, Sir Evelyn Baring proposed that the government of Dongola be entrusted to Abd-el-Kader, supported by black troops. The great Proconsul added :—

"I would earnestly impress upon Her Majesty's Government that it would be neither politically wise nor dignified to carry out at once the policy of retreat from Dongola and the immediate neighbourhood."¹

All argument was in vain. The Government would not recall its decision. On 23rd April, however, it had authorized Lord Wolseley to proceed to Suakin in order that he might be able to form an opinion on the spot in regard to the points which it would be desirable to hold.

By the time that Wolseley had reached the Red Sea port the Government had decided not to go ahead, at all events for the moment, with the construction of the railway to Berber. Lord Wolseley accordingly telegraphed to the Marquis of Hartington on 4th May, that if it was positively decided not to push forward the railway

¹ Cromer, *op. cit.*, ii, 29.

as part of the campaign against the Mahdi at Khartum, he advised the immediate embarkation of the Guards, the navvies, and the Australians, leaving only the Indian contingent and one British battalion for a garrison at Suakin. In a further despatch, the necessity was stressed of taking up the railway before the troops fell back.

It suggests itself that Lord Wolseley, in sending these messages, was endeavouring to carry out what he conceived to be the policy of the War Office. He was resolutely opposed to the abandonment of the Sudan. He recognized, however, that the responsibility devolved not upon him, but upon London, to say what should be done. He was but an agent charged with the execution of a programme defined by his superiors. He felt that his advice dealt only with the means of giving effect to the will of the Cabinet. Great, therefore, was his surprise to receive on 8th May a telegram to the effect that "the Government did not approve of his suggestion to take up the railway and ship off the plant, but that he should arrange to hold the line pending consideration whether it should be carried onwards".¹

This telegram caused Lord Wolseley to feel that his self-respect called for the sending of a reply couched in these words :—

"What you term my proposals were the military dispositions recommended in order to give effect to your policy at Suakin, to stop the railway, and send away as many troops as could be spared for service elsewhere. If the garrison here is to be seriously reduced the railway must be either taken up or abandoned. Unless you have some clearly defined Sudan policy to initiate, any military operations, such as the extension of the railway would entail, would be to throw away uselessly valuable lives."²

When this telegram reached London it convinced those in authority that Lord Wolseley knew his own mind. It did more than that. It persuaded the War Office to act in accordance with that officer's recommendations. In a word, instructions were given for the immediate

¹ Royle, *op. cit.*, ii, 375.

² *Ibid.*, p. 375.

embarkation of the expedition. Before the end of May all the British troops, with the exception of the Shropshire Regiment and a portion of the Indian contingent, had left Suakin.

Before these various decisions had been carried into effect, Sir Evelyn Baring put his position on record in no uncertain terms. He telegraphed the Foreign Office that :—

“In view of the decision of the Government (to evacuate Dongola) instructions should be given to send down all troops and as many of the civil population as wish to leave to Wady Halfa. . . . Your Lordship will understand that we make this recommendation only because we consider it to be the necessary consequence of the decision of Her Majesty’s Government to abandon the province of Dongola at once, but that it must in no way be taken to imply our agreement with that decision.”¹

On 24th June the Ministry of the Marquess of Salisbury succeeded that of Mr. Gladstone. On the Conservative Cabinet coming into power one of the first questions which it considered was that of the problem of the Valley of the Nile. The new Premier declared that England had a mission in Egypt and that until it was accomplished it was idle to talk of withdrawal. But the evacuation of the Sudan stood upon a different footing. Here Lord Salisbury found himself face to face with certain stern realities. The whole of the Sudan south of Dongola had been abandoned. The Prime Minister decided that the best thing to do was to consult Lord Wolseley. That officer replied on 27th June, and therefore within three days after the induction into office of the new Cabinet, that :—

“You cannot get out of Egypt for many years to come. If the present policy of retreat be persisted in the Mahdi will become stronger and stronger, and you will have to increase your garrisons and submit to the indignity of being threatened by him. Eventually you will have to fight him to hold your position in Egypt. . . . To

¹ *The Story of the Khedivate*, by Edward Dickey, London, Rivington (1902), p. 390.

advance in the autumn on Khartum and discredit the Mahdi by a serious defeat on his own ground would finish him. The operation, if done deliberately, would be a simple one ; and, as far as anything can be a certainty in war, it would be a certainty. . . . My advice, therefore, is carry out autumn campaign up the Nile as originally intended. I would leave Suakin as it is."

There was a clarion call in that despatch. It may, perhaps, have fallen upon sympathetic ears. Lord Salisbury, however, was a man whose mind controlled his heart. A few days elapsed, and on 2nd July, the Government telegraphed that, "Her Majesty's Government, after a full consideration of all the circumstances, were not prepared to reverse the orders given by their predecessors by countermanding the retreat of the force from Dongola."¹ Whatever may be one's own opinion as to the wisdom of the course thus adopted by Lord Salisbury, it would be improper to blame him for what he did. The Gladstone Ministry had been defeated upon a question foreign to its Sudan policy. No new elections had been held. There was nothing to show that the House of Commons was dissatisfied with the programme of evacuation. Had the new Government attempted to undo all that had been agreed on, its fate might have been in jeopardy. It had, in a word, no mandate from the people to justify a new line of action.

While Sir Evelyn Baring, the diplomatist, vigorously protested against the evacuation of the Sudan, Lord Cromer, the historian, was of a contrary opinion. He wrote in *Modern Egypt* that :—

"There can be little doubt that the British Government acted wisely in deciding to retreat from Dongola. The views of the military authorities were based on the presumed political necessity of 'smashing the Mahdi' at Khartum. No such necessity existed in reality."² We should have read with interest the arguments which

¹ Royle, *op. cit.*, ii, 380.

² Cromer, *op. cit.*, ii, 29.

induced the Earl of Cromer to overrule Sir Evelyn Baring. Unfortunately, they are not accessible, if they were ever reduced to writing. Suffice it to say, however, that *Kismet*, which always insists upon being one of the most important of all actors in the Egyptian drama, appeared upon the scene in the part of the Grim Destroyer before the evacuation of Dongola had been completed. In other words, Muhammad Ahmad, the Mahdi, died suddenly on or about 20th June.

"His death," wrote Lord Cromer, "exercised a dispiriting effect on his followers." Dicey records that the Dervish chief died of smallpox.¹ Sir Reginald Wingate is authority for a more sensational story. He recounted that :—

"A woman, daughter of a townsman who had lost children, wives, property and all, in the long siege, submitted to outrage and obtained a terrible revenge. On the night of the 14th June she gave the effeminate and debauched prophet a deadly poison, and, after lingering in great agony, he died on the 22nd of the month."²

Father Ohrwalder, who was a prisoner in the Mahdi's camp when Muhammad Ahmad died, gives a different version of that leader's death. His theory is fatty degeneration of the heart.³ Rudolf Slatin Pasha, who had an equally favourable opportunity for learning the truth, calls the fatal malady typhus fever.⁴ Thomas Archer, who has written with authority of the War in Egypt and the Sudan, more or less falls in with the Slatin theory, for he proclaims that "it was believed from the description of the disorder that the Mahdi's death was the result of spotted typhus".⁵ H. C. Jackson, who was for years in the Sudan political service, says that it was either poison or typhoid fever that carried

¹ Dicey, *op. cit.*, p. 391.

² Wingate, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

³ *Ten Years' Captivity in the Mahdi's Camp*, from the original manuscript of Father Joseph Ohrwalder, by Major F. R. Wingate, London, Sampson Low, Marston & Co. (1892), p. 160.

⁴ *Fire and Sword in the Sudan*, by Rudolf C. Slatin Pasha, translated by Major F. R. Wingate, London, Edward Arnold (1896), p. 369.

⁵ *The War in Egypt and the Sudan*, by Thomas Archer, London, i, 261.

the man off.¹ Without seeking to reconcile these contradictory statements, suffice it to say that even if the Mahdi were, as Sir Reginald Wingate expressed it, "an effeminate and debauched prophet," he was not effeminate in the sense of effete or "too voluptuous to fight".

It is extremely difficult to tell whether he was or was not sincere. He lived in an environment of religious fanaticism. He could readily have inoculated himself with an auto-intoxicant that would have made him believe that he was the Chosen One of Allah. But whether he was a charlatan or not is beside the issue. He was a dynamic political power. His death created a new situation in that a new factor, Mahdiism, took the place of Muhammad Ahmad, the Mahdi.

He had foreseen this eventuality, and had sought to meet it by choosing his Khalifa or successor and by issuing, in ample time, a proclamation giving effect to this nomination. He endeavoured, in a word, to emulate Muhammad the Prophet. His Abu Bakr was Abdullah Ibn Es Said Hamadallah. Here is the *Elam Shariah* which the Mahdi had caused to be published before illness—or poison—overtook him:

"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Clement—know ye, O my followers, that the representative of the righteous (Abu Bakr) and the Emir of the Mahdi army, referred to in the Prophet's vision, is Es Said Abdullah Ibn Es Said Hamadallah. He is of me and I am of him. Behave with all reverence to him as you have to me, submit to him as you submit to me, and believe in him as you believe in me, rely on all he says and never question any of his proceedings. All that he does is by order of the Prophet or by my permission. He is my agent in carrying out the will of the Prophet. If God and His Prophet desire to do anything, we must submit to their will, and if anyone shows the slightest disinclination he is not a Believer and has no faith in God. The Khalifa Abdullah is the representative of the righteous. . . .

¹ *Osman Digna*, by H. C. Jackson, London, Methuen (1926), p. 109.

"The Khalifa Abdullah is the Commander of the Faithful and is my Khalifa and agent in all religious matters. Therefore, I leave off as I began—'believe in him, obey his orders, never doubt what he says, but give him all your confidence and trust him in all affairs.' And may God be with you."¹

The man upon whom the mantle of authority thus fell was about 45 years old. He had a light brown complexion, a sympathetic Arab face on which the marks of smallpox were visible, an aquiline nose, a well-shaped mouth, slight moustache, and a fringe of hair on his cheeks but rather thicker on his chin. He was about middle height, neither thin nor stout. He generally spoke with a smile and showed a row of glistening white teeth.²

Abdullah's pride and confidence in his own powers beggar description. He firmly believed that he was capable of doing anything and everything. And as he always claimed to act under divine inspiration, he never hesitated to claim the merits of others as his own. He delighted in annoying and causing disappointment. He was never happier than when he had brought people to complete destruction by confiscating their property, throwing them into chains, and reducing entire tribes to impotence.

During the Mahdi's lifetime the Khalifa was largely responsible for the severity of the proceedings enacted in the former's name and for the merciless manner in which he treated his defeated enemies. It was Abdullah who gave the order for no quarter at the storming of Khartum. It was he who subsequently authorized the wholesale massacre of men, women, and children. After the fall of that city it was he who, for a period of four days, declared the Shaigia tribe to be outlaws.³

Slatin Pasha is the authority for this description of the Khalifa. He emphasizes Abdullah's great activity, and stresses the fact that the man "does not lead a life

¹ Wingate, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

² Slatin, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 516.

of sensuous ease to which his inclinations undoubtedly tend".¹ Archer refers to the chieftain as "an able and unscrupulous leader" and probably comes very near to the truth. But, however great may have been his ability and however devoid of conscience he may have been, as he was the Sheikh of only a relatively insignificant tribe, all the chiefs of the great clans were at first reluctant to follow him.² It therefore took Abdullah some time to get into his stride.

While the Khalifa was seeking to strengthen his hold upon the reins of state, the centre of gravity in matters military shifted to Suakin. Colonel Chermiside was there in communication with Ras Alula who, with a large Abyssinian force, marched to the relief of Kassala. The Arabs occupied a strongly fortified place near Sufeit, but were defeated with great loss.³

In the early days of December reports from Wady Halfa again directed notice to the forces occupying posts on the Nile. The Khalifa seemed to be more certain of his ground and appeared to be anxious to consolidate his power by branching out towards the north. He assembled his followers about 90 miles from Wady Halfa at a place called Ginnis. General Sir Francis Grenfell, as division commander, and Generals Butler and Huyshe, each leading a brigade, decided on an advance. The Cameron Highlanders and two Egyptian battalions were engaged. The Dervishes put up a stiff fight, but were forced to retreat. Their losses were very heavy.⁴

This battle ended the menace of an immediate attack on Egypt. The British were thus afforded an opportunity to reorganize the Egyptian army. "Previous to 1882," we learn from Sir Reginald Wingate, "the army had been trained by American officers, soldierly men of varied experience; but they were permitted to have little or nothing to do with the actual training of men; they were chiefly employed on staff duties in connection with topographical and

¹ Ohrwalder, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

³ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

² Archer, *op. cit.*, iv, 261.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

other work, and in explorations in the Sudan and in the deserts between the Nile and the Red Sea." ¹

The last of these American officers, with one single exception, left the Egyptian service in 1878. But one American, General Stone, remained after that date. He was faithful to Tewfik Pasha in the Khedive's hour of trial, but, alone and deprived of the co-operation of his compatriots, he was unable to stem the disorganization fomented by Arabi. General Stone was dismissed in 1882, and was, therefore, not even indirectly responsible for the uprising of the Mahdi. In other words, the utter helplessness of the Egyptian army during the last phase of Gordon's life could in no sense be imputed to the American officers who had from 1869 to 1878 led the Egyptian forces. When the British undertook the reorganization they had not even a shell with which to work, but that condition was in no sense attributable to the Americans, whose services ended before the machine went to pieces.

On 20th December, 1882, appeared the decree of His Highness the Khedive disbanding the old army and appointing Sir Evelyn Wood, V.C., as *Sirdar* of the new one. Permission was given for the appointment in Egypt of officers serving on full pay in the Queen's army and the following were provisionally selected :—

| <i>Rank in English Army.</i> | <i>Name.</i> | <i>Regiment.</i> | <i>Rank and Appointment in the Egyptian Army.</i> |
|--------------------------------------|---|----------------------------|---|
| Major-Gen. | Sir Evelyn Wood, V.C., K.C.M.G., K.C.B. | Staff . . . | Sirdar and Chief of the Staff of the Army. |
| Lieutenant | E. Stuart Wortley . | King's Royal Rifles . | Major, Aide-de-Camp to his Excellency the Sirdar. |
| Lieut.-Col. | T. Fraser, C.M.G. | Staff, Royal Engineers | Colonel, Adjutant, and Quartermaster - General of the Army. |
| Captain . | F. G. Slade . . | Staff, Royal Artillery | Lieut.-Col., Assistant-Adjutant, and Quartermaster-General of the Army. |
| Colonel . | F. Grenfell, C.B. | Staff, King's Royal Rifles | Brig.-Gen., commandant of a brigade of infantry. |
| Lieut.-Col. | F. Duncan . . | Royal Artillery | Colonel, commandant of the artillery. |

¹ Wingate, op. cit., p. 204.

| <i>Rank in English Army.</i> | <i>Name.</i> | <i>Regiment.</i> | <i>Rank and Appointment in the Egyptian Army.</i> |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Lieut.-Col. | A. M. Taylor | 19th Hussars | Lieut.-Col., commandant of a cavalry regiment. |
| Major | H. C. Chermiside, C.M.G. | Staff, Royal Engineers | Lieut.-Col., commandant of a battalion. |
| Major | H. H. Parr, C.M.G. | Staff, Somersetshire Light Infantry | Lieut.-Col., commandant of a battalion. |
| Major | C. M. Watson | Staff, Royal Engineers | Colonel, Surveyor-General. |
| Major | A. S. Wynne | King's Own Light Infantry | Lieut.-Col., commandant of a battalion. |
| Major | C. H. Smith | King's Royal Rifles | Lieut.-Col., commandant of a battalion. |
| Captain | J. Wodehouse | Royal Artillery | Major, commandant of a battery of artillery. |
| Captain | J. O. Quirk | Welsh Regiment | Major, second commandant of a battalion. |
| Captain | A. B. Shakespear | Royal Marine Artillery | Major, second commandant of a battalion. |
| Captain | H. Kitchener | Royal Engineers | Major, second in command of a cavalry regiment. |
| Lieutenant | C. S. Parsons | Royal Horse Artillery | Major, commandant of a battery of artillery. |
| Lieutenant | C. C. Turner | Shropshire Light Infantry. | Major, supernumerary. |
| Lieutenant | C. B. Pigott | King's Royal Rifles | Major, second in command of a battalion. |
| Lieutenant | C. F. Davidson | Cameron Highlanders | Major, supernumerary. |
| Lieutenant | A. Sinclair | First Beloochee Regiment | Major, supernumerary. |
| Lieutenant | A. C. Haggard | King's Own Borderers | Major, supernumerary. |
| Lieutenant | H. M. Rundle | Royal Artillery | Major, supernumerary. |
| Lieutenant | D. Carter | Royal Artillery | Major, supernumerary. |
| Lieutenant | R. A. Marriott | Royal Marine Artillery | Major, supernumerary. |

The number of men was originally fixed at 6,000. The conditions of service were, at the outset, four years with the colours, but this was soon altered to four years in the army, four years in the police and in the reserve. This rule has also been modified.

The native officers for the newly organized army were carefully selected from the disbanded force. The Military School was speedily remodelled and fairly well trained cadets were available within a reasonably short period. When these men showed the proper aptitude they were rapidly pushed on by their commanding officers.

An English officer, on joining the Egyptian army, was, as a rule, granted the rank next—or, in some cases next but one—above that he had in the British

service. In English-officered battalions there were, at all events in the earlier days, no native officers of higher rank than *saghkolaghasi* (adjutant-major). Promotion to the higher grades was kept open for native officers through the native battalions and corps.¹

Commands were given in Turkish. This rule was adhered to until the outbreak of the Great War, when Arabic was substituted. This meant that until 1914 commands were given by officers, English and Egyptian, in a language which they did not understand to men who did not comprehend the words which were used. All of which, it may be added parenthetically, proves that military commands are largely grunts or loud sounds emitted by persons in authority and carried out by automatons.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

CHAPTER IV

THE DRUMMOND WOLFF MISSION

LORD SALISBURY was seldom in a hurry. Leisurely he reached the conclusion that a Turkish occupation of Egypt was the only practical solution of the Egyptian problem. Lord Iddesleigh—then Sir Stafford Northcote—was very anxious to have the British troops removed from the Valley of the Nile. The Prime Minister allowed himself to be persuaded by his colleague. He was probably impressed by the fact that the most militant of his Ministers, Lord Randolph Churchill, who was Secretary of State for India in his administration, had a concrete plan to give effect to this orientation.¹

Looking back at the matter across the span of years it seems almost impossible to realize that it was under a Liberal Government that England intervened in Egypt and that a Conservative Cabinet, presided over by a Cecil, sought to subordinate Britain's position in the Land of the Pharaohs to that of Turkey. This anomaly is made even more striking by the circumstance that it was a Churchill who appears to have blazed the way to such a programme. And the strangeness of all of this is further emphasized by the fact that England then had as her representative in Egypt one of the big brains of the nineteenth century whom she kept in office but subordinated, for the nonce, to a politician who had lost his seat in the preceding elections. This statesman without a constituency, whom London converted overnight into a super Consul-General or High Commissioner, was Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, a former Parliamentarian who had been known only as a member of a group that had goaded Mr. Gladstone into madness during the Liberals' term of office.²

¹ Dicey, *op. cit.*, p. 407.

² *The Transit of Egypt*, by Lieut.-Colonel P. G. Elgood, London, Edward Arnold (1928), p. 109.

It thus came to pass that when Sir Evelyn Baring was straining every nerve to lick the finances of Egypt into shape and to secure the maintenance of law and order in that country, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff arrived at Constantinople on 22nd August, 1885, as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary on a special mission to the Sultan having reference to the affairs of Egypt. The object of Lord Salisbury was undoubtedly to arrive at such an understanding with Turkey as would allay the intense and growing jealousy of the Porte at the presence of the British in the Valley of the Nile, and, at the same time, diminish the hostility of France. He desired to provide for the maintenance and development of the reforms which Baring had started. He sought, nevertheless, to reduce the amount and duration of British interference and, likewise, to conciliate the other Powers interested in Egypt.¹

The objective which the Prime Minister had in view was laudable. His motives were praiseworthy. But the means adopted for the execution of this policy were open to serious criticism. We say this because Sir Henry Drummond Wolff's mandate reacted adversely upon Sir Evelyn Baring's responsibilities, and the latter's presence in Cairo and the growing recognition of his great ability made it difficult for the former to get into a proper stride. In other words, the mission given the defeated Parliamentary checkmated the efforts of the British Consul-General, and the dominant personality of the diplomatist neutralized the well-meaning zeal of Lord Salisbury's favourite. But, be all this as it may, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff left London with a letter in his pocket dated 7th August, 1885, which said:—

"It is the wish of Her Majesty's Government to recognize in its full significance the position which is secured to His Majesty the Sultan as Sovereign by Treaties or other instruments having a force under international law. . . . You will, of course, point out to His Majesty that in some way or other it is incumbent

¹ *England in Egypt*, by Viscount Milner, London, Edward Arnold (1904), p. 117.

on the British to do what is in their power to provide for the pacification and order of the Sudan. In their opinion the military co-operation of the Sultan will be the most effective plan for obtaining this result, but if that co-operation should be denied them they will not be released from their obligation. It will be necessary for them to look for other means of providing for the defence and order of the Sudan.”¹

When Lord Salisbury wrote this letter his Parliamentary position was far from secure. He had to face a House of Commons which had been called into being as a Liberal Chamber. The majority of its membership continued to owe obedience to the party of Gladstone. It had overthrown its leader upon a question which was foreign to Egypt and the Sudan. Its dominant sentiment was still opposed to active intervention in the Valley of the Nile. It gave reluctant and but passive consent to the presence of English troops in Egypt.

Lord Salisbury had to take cognizance of this state of mind when wrestling with the intricacies of the Egyptian problem. His instructions to Sir Henry Drummond Wolff were accordingly attuned to the realities of the political chess-board. They meant to affirm that British interests required that law and order must be preserved in Egypt and the Sudan, that England would welcome Turkish co-operation but could not stand aside if the Porte did nothing. Sincerity and frankness inspired such words. Political courage dictated them. We read, however, in a work written by one of Baring's outstanding lieutenants, that—

“The gist of the instructions furnished to the British High Commissioner, put into undiplomatic English, would seem to have been this: ‘We wish to make a cat's paw of the Turk, and at the same time to induce him to recognize our right, exclusive of all but himself, to land in certain circumstances our troops in Egypt. Induce him to take on himself the business of smashing the Khalifa. If he hesitates, warn him that we may establish a Government composed of local material in

¹ *The Making of Modern Egypt*, by Sir Auckland Colvin, London, Seeley (1906), p. 147

the Sudan which may not prove much to his liking ; or, failing that, we may persuade some other foreign Power to restore order there. If he agrees to our proposals, in a given period of time, we will withdraw British troops from Egypt.”¹

The unfairness of these strictures is too obvious to require comment. Lord Salisbury’s record of public service refutes them. His procedure was ill advised, but it was straightforward.

The preliminary stage of the negotiations thus started was comparatively easy. The Sultan was well disposed towards the proposal to send troops to Egypt, provided their expenses were paid by somebody else. The Turkish bureaucrats welcomed the opportunity to establish Ottoman authority in Egypt. They saw in the suggestion an admirable occasion for enrichment. By October the Sultan, the palace entourage, and the official world of Constantinople were all radiant with smiles at the delightful visions which were opened up to them. An agreement was accordingly signed on the fifth of that month by the British Envoy Extraordinary and the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The Accord provided for joint measures to be adopted ; first, for the best ways of tranquillizing the Sudan by pacific means ; secondly, for the reorganization of the Egyptian army, in connection with His Highness the Khedive ; and thirdly, for introducing such modifications as might be considered necessary, within the limits of the Imperial Firman, in all branches of the Egyptian administration.² Under the Convention Turkey bound herself, in case of need, to send an army to Egypt to support the Khedivial Government. England, on the other hand, pledged herself to withdraw her troops at a date to be fixed by a subsequent agreement.³

Sir Henry Drummond Wolff was the High Commissioner selected by England to work out the practical mechanics of this Treaty. The Turks chose *Ghazi Mukhtar Pasha*, who had acquired during the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

² *Ibid.*, p. 149.

³ *Dicey, op. cit.*, p. 411.

Turco-Russian war a world-wide reputation as a first-class soldier. It was not, however, this officer's high standing as a military man which gained him this appointment. The choice fell upon him because the Porte wanted to exile him. He was out of favour, and the Cairo mission afforded an excellent means of shelving him. This carries with it the corollary that not only was the British delegate out of touch with the English officials with whom he had to work in Egypt, but also that his Ottoman colleague really represented nobody.

To accentuate, as it were, the impossible situation thus created, the two High Commissioners were called upon to begin operations in a hostile atmosphere. The Egyptians were opposed to any arrangements which might have made the Turk master of the situation. The bondholders felt that any kind of Ottoman intervention in Egyptian affairs would imperil their financial interests. Sir Auckland Colvin's language shows that the British officials in the Khedivial service were not friendly to delegates who impinged upon their preserves.

Wolff and Mukhtar Pasha sought to systematize their work. They agreed that it was to be the especial care of the Turk to consult with the Khedive as to the best means of tranquillizing the Sudan by pacific measures and that it would fall upon the Englishman to examine all branches of the Egyptian Administration. In both instances the other High Commissioner was to be fully advised by his colleague of everything that he did. "They set themselves to improve upon Sir Evelyn Wood's methods of creating a new Egyptian army," writes Sir Auckland Colvin, "to assist Sir Evelyn Baring in the reform of Egyptian Administration, and in reorganizing the finances; while hoping to induce the Sudan to submit to their caresses, and to prevail on the Dervishes to re-enter the circle of those happy peoples who acknowledge the sovereignty of the Turkish Sultan."¹

Need it be said that the High Commissioners failed in every respect? Their task was an impossible one. The

¹ Colvin, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

atmosphere in which they worked was not conducive to results. They meant well, no doubt, but they had not Baring's broad vision, sublime courage, and unflinching constancy. His was a master mind. Individually they were his intellectual inferiors. And, besides, they could not agree. They could not come to an understanding in regard to the strength and composition of the new Egyptian army. They could not get together upon any practical suggestion in aid of measures of reform or of finance. They could not evolve an idea which induced a single Dervish to trust to the affectionate compassion of the Sultan. All that they did was to spend the winter months in a delightful climate where social engagements were numerous, but left them sufficient leisure in which to write lengthy reports. Sir Henry Drummond Wolff's contributions to the Blue Books deal exclusively with the political or the purely international aspects of the Egyptian question.¹ They do not refer to the Sudan. Mukhtar Pasha's messages appear to have been lost, destroyed, or stolen. All this epistolary zeal of the two High Commissioners is, accordingly, of no avail to anyone whose attention is riveted on the Black Country.

They sent Youssef Pasha Shuhdi to Wady Halfa so that he might try his hand at negotiating with the Dervishes. He left for the frontier in May, 1886. Had he been as prolific with his pen as were Wolff and Mukhtar his despatches would make interesting reading. But, after all, he had but little to report. What information he gave to Cairo was to the effect that the Sudanese were very discontented with the Arabs and the exaction of arbitrary taxes together with compulsory rule, and that the people would rejoice at the return of the Egyptians. "This," asserts Sir Reginald Wingate, "in a degree was doubtless the case."²

To all who had any appreciation of the true nature of the Mahdist movement it was obvious that the Egyptian's mandate was foredoomed to failure. He probably knew that it was and abstained from writing

¹ Ibid., loc. cit.

² Wingate, op. cit., p. 285.

useless despatches. His mission, however, encouraged the Khalifa to get into touch with the crowned heads of Europe and seek to persuade them to embrace Islam. Abdullah became so bold as to address Queen Victoria. His letter, after pointing out what had happened during the last four years, added :—

“ Thus hast thou erred in many ways, and art suffering great loss, wherefrom there is no refuge for thee save by turning to God the King and entering among the people of Islam and the followers of the Mahdi, grace be unto him. . . . I am a weak servant and there is no strength in me alone. In God is my refuge, in Him is my trust, and He has promised His aid to those who trust Him and seek asylum with Him. The forelock of all kings is in the hands of God. And thou, if thou wilt not yield to the command of God and enter among the people of Islam and the followers of the Mahdi, grace be unto him, come thyself and thy armies and fight with the host of God ; and if thou wilt not come then be ready in thy place ; for at His pleasure and in the time that He shall will it, the hosts of God will raze thy dwelling, and let thee taste of sorrow because thou hast turned away from the path of the Lord ; for therein is sufficiency.”¹

The besetting difficulties which confronted the two High Commissioners did not deter them. They adhered to their task. But Sir Henry Drummond Wolff finally saw that he and Mukhtar Pasha could not come to an agreement. The Briton, therefore, left his colleague and betook himself from the banks of the Nile to the shores of the Bosphorus. Muhammad Said, the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs, was found to be more amenable to reason. A Convention was accordingly drawn up, on 22nd May, 1887, between the British High Commissioner and the Ottoman Minister which was very comprehensive in its scope.

This agreement arranged for the military defence and organization of Egypt. England agreed that the British troops were to be withdrawn from the Valley of

¹ Colvin, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

the Nile at the end of three years, unless, at that date, the appearance of external or internal danger should necessitate the postponement of the evacuation. It was stipulated that, in such a contingency, the force was to be withdrawn as soon as the danger had disappeared. Two years after the withdrawal of the English units the general supervision exercised by Great Britain over the Egyptian army was to cease. Thenceforth Egypt was to enjoy territorial immunity. On the ratification of the Convention, the Powers were to be invited to recognize and guarantee the inviolability of Egyptian territory. "Nevertheless," the Convention continued, "the Imperial Ottoman Government will make use of its right of occupying Egypt militarily, if there are reasons to fear an invasion from without, or if order and security in the interior were disturbed, or if the Khedivate of Egypt refused to execute its duties towards the sovereign court, or its international obligations.

"On its side the Government of Her Britannic Majesty is authorized by this Convention to send in the above-mentioned cases troops into Egypt which will take the measures necessary to remove these dangers. In taking these measures the commanders of these troops will act with all the regard due to the rights of the Sovereign Power.

"The Ottoman troops, as well as the British troops, will be withdrawn as soon as the causes requiring this intervention shall have ceased.

"If by reason of hindrances the Ottoman Government should not send troops to Egypt, it will send a Commissioner to remain during the period of the sojourn of the British troops with their Commander."¹

A further article provided that Great Britain and Turkey should invite first the Great Powers, and then all the others "who had made or accepted arrangements with the Khedivate of Egypt" to give their adhesion to the Convention. Annexed to the main document was a declaration by the English Plenipotentiary that, in case during the three years allowed for the withdrawal

¹ Milner, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

of the troops any one of the great Mediterranean Powers should not have accepted the Convention, England would regard this state of things as "an external danger" justifying the postponement of the evacuation. A protocol was likewise annexed, in which Great Britain and Turkey agreed to address the Powers with a view to the establishment in Egypt of "a local and uniform jurisdiction and legislature" applicable to foreign residents.¹

While the negotiations preliminary to the signature of the accord were going on, the embers of diplomatic opposition smouldered. Directly it was signed they burst into flame. M. de Nelidoff, the Russian Ambassador at Constantinople, at once "sent to the Palace remonstrances and reproached the Grand Vizier with having gratuitously sacrificed the rights of the Sultan to England". "Similar language," Sir Henry Drummond Wolff reported on 27th May, "had been used to the Turkish Ambassador at Saint Petersburg by M. de Giers, who said that Russia would probably refuse her adhesion and act in the interest of the Sultan."²

The French Government also took strong exception to the right of re-entry into Egypt which the Convention conferred upon England. On 7th June the Count de Montebello, who represented France at Constantinople, addressed a minatory letter to the Sultan in which he said that "the French Government had definitely decided not to accept the situation which would result from the ratification of the Egyptian convention".³

France and Russia, in those days, were rapidly drifting towards their dual alliance. It had in fact been created, but it had not been ratified by the public opinion of the two countries. Their pressure upon Constantinople was not, however, the result of any Entente between them. It sprang from the identity of their interests, or more accurately, perhaps, from the similarity of their pretensions.

Ever since the Russo-Turkish war, Muscovite

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

² *Cromer, op. cit.*, ii, 378.

³ *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

authority on the Bosphorus had been supreme. Saint Petersburg was very jealous of this authority. The Holy Synod would not have countenanced any abandonment of this hegemony by the Czar. France, on the other hand, looked upon Egypt as part of her cultural dominions. She refused to admit England's special position in the Valley of the Nile. She felt that her prestige made it impossible for her to agree to a convention which reserved to London a right to intervene which was not accorded to Paris.

It was thus easy for Russia and France to act along parallel lines. The Sultan was perplexed. On 9th July the Turkish plenipotentiaries called on Wolff. 'They said that the recent language of the French and Russian Ambassadors, both at the Palace and the Porte, had much disturbed the Sultan. His Majesty had been told that if he ratified the Convention France and Russia would thereby be given the right to occupy provinces of the Empire, and to leave only after a similar Convention had been ratified. France might do so in Syria and Russia in Armenia. Religious feeling had also been excited in this direction.'¹

The Turks are great believers in political formulas. They implored Sir Henry Drummond Wolff to "advise as to some formula by which these difficulties might be met". The Englishman's practical common sense told him, however, that it was not a case of seeking for phraseology but of recognizing realities. France and Russia had not minced words, he explained to the Turks. They knew what they wanted. Draftsmanship would not alter the case. It behoved the Sultan to sign on the dotted line or to accept conditions as they then obtained in Egypt and in the Sudan. The Sultan hesitated. He saw the advantages offered him by the Agreement. He did not wish to lose them. But he was afraid of Russia and France, and he fell back on his favourite resource. He fought for delay.

According to article VII of the Convention the ratifications were to be exchanged within one month

¹ Ibid., loc. cit.

of the date on which the agreement was signed. Four days before the expiration of this period the Turkish Ambassador represented to Lord Salisbury that "the Sultan was much fatigued after Bairam" and wanted time to consider the whole question. A short delay was granted. When this ran out, a further term was accorded. The Turkish Ambassador then sought to renew negotiations. He was informed by Lord Salisbury that "so long as the Sultan was so much under the influence of other advisers as to repudiate an agreement that he had himself so recently sanctioned, any fresh agreement would obviously be liable to meet the same fate as the late convention".¹

The answer definitely assigned the convention so carefully elaborated on 22nd May, 1887, to the waste-paper basket. The Wolff-Mukhtar conversations thus had but one practical effect. They demonstrated that England was prepared to get out of Egypt and to abandon the Sudan, but that she had no intention of becoming a passive spectator of the overthrow of law and order in the Valley of the Nile. The result was that her provisional occupation of Egypt became more or less stabilized. It was during the period of "stabilization" that the Khalifa was defeated and the Sudan redeemed from barbarism.

¹ Ibid., p. 380.

CHAPTER V

THE DEFENCE OF EGYPT

THE battle of Ginnis, fought on 30th December, 1885, ushered in a new phase in the protean Egyptian question. The Khedivial troops did so well in that engagement that General Grenfell, in his despatch to General Stephenson, characterized "the behaviour of all ranks during the action as steady, and the conduct of the whole force of Egyptian troops as very creditable".¹ Not only did this commendable behaviour convince the British that the Egyptian army could with time, care, and work be developed into an adequate fighting organization, but it encouraged Sir Evelyn Baring and his military advisers to leave to the remodelled Egyptian army the main defence of Egypt against the Dervishes.²

But if the lesson taught on the fields of Ginnis proved to the British that under proper officers the Egyptian *fellah* could be converted into a soldier, the followers of the Khalifa were not dismayed by their repulse. The action was unmistakably a severe blow to them, but, as they refused to concede that they had been defeated, the moral effect of their rout was lost. The letter written to the Khalifa by his commanding officer on 4th January, 1886, gives us an idea of their mental attitude. It read :—

"When your beloved troops were besieging the Unbelievers at Mograkah, who were greatly harassed by our troops, they suddenly received very large reinforcements. Our beloved Ansars did not know of this sudden reinforcement, and early on the morning of 23 Rabia El Awal (30th December, 1885) the enemy opened fire on our beloved troops from all sides. The firing

¹ Wingate, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

² Cromer, *op. cit.*, ii, 60.

lasted for a long time ; some of our men were killed, and also some of the enemy were killed.

“ To-day some of our men came from Mograkah, and state that there were a large number of the Unbelievers, and that they had repaired the railway in a wonderfully short time. Some of them say their strength is 5,000, others say more. . . . To-day I wrote to En Nejumi to come here at once. Please send me reinforcements at once before the Unbelievers arrive. I think the Faithful may now win a victory, but if we delay the chance will be lost.”¹

The reference to “ our beloved Ansars ” stresses the religious fanaticism which held together these Arab hordes. The poet may ask “ What’s in a name ? ” Both the Mahdi and the Khalifa, however, knew—

“ The power of grace, the magic of a name.”

Muhammad Ahmad had at the outset insisted that his followers be called by the Persian name “ Darwish ”, which means a poor man, because he desired to impress upon them that poverty was an honour. When their abstemiousness had brought them wealth, he felt that this title had outlived its usefulness. He therefore arranged to have a vision and then issued a proclamation couched in these words :—

“ In the name of God the Merciful, the Clement, from Muhammad El Mahdi to all the Brethren. All the Faithful have already been cautioned not to call themselves ‘ dervishes ’ but ‘ ansars ’. That is to say, those whose hearts are entirely consecrated to God, and whose minds have become enlightened by a desire to possess the joys of the world to come, quitting the pleasures of this life, and having full faith in the power of the Almighty who has created Paradise for those who are faithful to Him. The joys of Paradise are such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive. A man who is in hope of gaining such a reward should certainly cease to be called a dervish, that is to say a poor man. But, on the contrary,

he should be called an intelligent, far-seeing man, a defender of God's cause, a follower of God's will, an abstainer from all things which would displease Him. All such qualities are born from the light of intelligence. Any one who calls such a man a dervish deserves to be beaten seven times and receive many stripes."¹

This means that, by "the magic of a name", both the Mahdi and the Khalifa sought to impress upon their followers that death upon the battle-field opened to them the portals of a Paradise whose joys are such as "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive". And the corollary to this was that the mere fact that General Grenfell had won an important victory at Ginnis did not disconcert a body of men who worshipped at a shrine which made death in war a passport to such a happy hunting-ground.

The tactics adopted by British strategy tended to bolster up the courage of the Ansars. The Arabs, though temporarily checked by the defeat at Ginnis, never for a moment abandoned their original plan of campaign. They pushed small parties northwards. In February, 1886, the village of Koyah was raided by them, a new Emir was appointed at Dongola, a portion of Wad En Nejumi's command was transferred to the West bank of the Nile at Berber with orders to march on Merawi, and El Khalik, the chief who had lost the battle of Ginnis, was superseded by a more energetic leader, Morghani Siwari Ed Dahah.

While all this activity was inspiring the rank and file of the Khalifa's forces with confidence in themselves, those responsible for the defence of Egypt decided to fix the frontier of the Khedivial authority at Wady Halfa. All posts south of that place were withdrawn. The troops arrived there on 13th April. By 7th May, the reduced British army had gone into cantonments at Asswan, leaving Wady Halfa to the care of the Egyptian units.²

When the task of defending the frontier thus devolved entirely on the Egyptian army that force consisted of :

¹ Ibid., p. 48.

² Ibid., p. 281.

(1) Eight Egyptian batteries forming two brigades, the first under British and the second under native officers, one regiment of cavalry and four batteries of artillery, and

(2) Three Sudanese battalions, known as the 9th, 10th, and 11th.

At subsequent dates, but before the great drive of Omdurman which made the name of Kitchener of Khartum almost a household word began, there were added to the Egyptian Army :—

(1) Three Sudanese Battalions, the 12th, 13th, and 14th, and

(2) Four Egyptian Battalions, the 15th, 16th, 17th, and 18th.

Besides these there were, in 1898, 10 squadrons of cavalry, 5 batteries of artillery, 8 companies of camel corps, 3 companies of garrison artillery, etc., besides 13 gunboats.¹

It was a comparatively easy thing for the religious zealots who formed the background of the Khalifa's power to disseminate the information that the English and the Egyptians were afraid of the Ansars and were retiring before the victorious banners of the True Believers. The wish is so often father to the thought that it is quite probable that these active propagandists convinced themselves that their tales were true. At all events, when it was known at Omdurman, on 25th April, that the Khedivial authorities had evacuated all stations south of Wady Halfa and that the British had gone back to Asswan, there was general rejoicing, and fresh impetus was given to the movement northwards.

Wad En Nejumi appears to have led in these alleluias of joy. His was a colourful personality. He personified the true principles of militant Mahdism. "He was," wrote Lord Cromer, "at once the Peter the Hermit and the Prince Rupert of Dervish chivalry. He believed in Mahdism as he believed in himself. When summoned

¹ *The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*, a Compendium prepared by officers of the Sudan Government, edited by Lieut.-Col. Count Gleichen, London, Stationery Office, 1905, i, 252.

by Sir Francis Grenfell to surrender previous to the battle of Toski, he replied : ' We are not afraid of anyone ; we only fear God,' and, without a doubt, he spoke the truth. Few pictures are more touching than that of the host of wild Dervish prisoners mourning with heart-felt sorrow in the palm-grove of Toski over the body of the chieftain who had led them, their companions, their wives, their children, through sufferings and privations, to the destruction of their political hopes and to death."¹

Wad En Nejumi had in early life been a Fiki, like the Mahdi. He was Muhammad Ahmad's devoted friend. Stern, hard, ascetic, he was the incarnation of blind sincerity of conviction. He never transgressed the self-appointed strictness which ruled his conduct. Withal, a spice of madness entered into his composition. There was no man who did not trust his word. Mahdiism was the natural outlet for his wild temper. He was the Khalid of the Prophet's wars. He it was who prepared the stratagem which annihilated Hicks. He it was who crept silently through the shallow mud beyond the crumbled ramparts of Khartum. He was a man among men.²

Wad En Nejumi determined to strike while the iron was hot. He not only insisted upon the immediate invasion of Egypt, but burnt his house at Omdurman and vowed that he would not return until he had conquered that country. On his departure the Khalifa assembled his war-lords. They all stretched out their hands in the direction of Cairo and called out three times : "*Allahu Akbar.*" Then Abdullah cried out, in a loud voice : " O Ansars, fear not for the fight for the land of Egypt ; you will suffer much at the battle of Asswan, after which the whole land of Egypt will fall into your hands ; Ansars, you will also suffer much at the battle of Mecca, after which the whole country will be yours."³

This outburst of religious enthusiasm had naturally but a restricted audience. Proclamations carried it far

¹ Cromer, *op. cit.*, ii, 64.

² *Ibid.*, p. 382.

³ Wingate, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

and wide. Appeals were addressed not only to the Sudanese but to "all people in the South and North of Egypt" calling upon them to rise and smite the Turks who make a mockery of God's creed and who refuse to become true followers of the Mahdi. And, fearful lest someone might ask why the Mahdi had died before his mission had been accomplished, the Khalifa waxed eloquent and said it was not necessary for Muhammad Ahmad to live until he had taken Constantinople and Mecca. He loved God and died because, like Muhammad the Prophet, he was anxious to see his Maker.¹

Not only did the Khalifa thus rely upon propaganda, but he reorganized his fighting machine in order to give more vitality to his campaign. Muhammad El Kheir had long been the first of the Emirs. The Mahdi had made him second only to the Khalifa. The God of battle had, however, ruled against El Kheir, and so his primacy was taken from him. Wad En Nejumi was given the coveted rank. Second place was bestowed upon Osman Digna, and the third upon Hamid Abu Angar. Muhammad El Kheir had to be content with following in their wake.

It is written that—

"The best laid schemes o' mice and men
Gang aft agley,"

and the Khalifa and his four Emirs soon found that the poet was right. A revolt against the Mahdi's successor had been smouldering for some months in Darfur. It began to assume such serious proportions that it had to be suppressed before the Ansars could think of attacking Egypt in force. And, at about the same time, Kordofan gave them trouble. Dar Fertit was also unruly. And the Abyssinians took advantage of this unrest to make themselves a menace that required attention.²

The Abyssinians are Christians, and therefore the

¹ Ibid., p. 382.

² *The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*, a Compendium prepared by Gleichen, op. cit., i, 252.

appeal broadcast by the Khalifa in the name of Islam and the Mahdi meant nothing to them. If anything it was a challenge, although it would be a mistake to take their Christianity too seriously. But, be all this as it may, they lay beyond the orbit of influence of Abdullah and his Emirs. They had their own revendications, and fate decreed that they should be seeking to give effect to them just about the time when the Ansars contemplated making their drive against Egypt. The Abyssinian claims were born of the cession of Massawah by the Khedive to the Italians.

It will be recalled that before the advent of the Mahdi, Egypt and Abyssinia had for several years been more or less continuously on the very worst of terms. The control of the Red Sea littoral was the great bone of contention between them. Massawah, one of the main ports of the Red Sea, was coveted by Abyssinia, but was the capital or chief city of one of the provinces of Egypt. The Khedive on 6th February, 1885, ceded Massawah and its hinterland to the Italians. The Abyssinians deemed this a violation of a pact known as the Hewett Treaty. They were seriously annoyed. They had been stout adversaries of the Mahdi and were a bulwark of opposition not only to Islam but also to the Dervishes. They had as late as 23rd September, 1885, as the allies of the Ben Amir Arabs, attacked the armies of the Khalifa at Kufit, utterly routing their enemy, whose dead ran up to 3,000 men.¹ When, however, the Egyptian garrison retired from Massawah in November and was replaced by Italians, thus driving home the meaning of the February Treaty, Ras Alula refused to resume operations against the Muslims and retired.

Had the Abyssinians continued to sulk in their tents, the Khalifa could have pressed forward against Egypt without giving undue attention to them. In June, 1887, however, they yielded to another impulse and, led this time by Ras Adal, advanced into Gallabat and defeated the Ansars, then under Wad Arbab, killing that chieftain. The Khalifa sent reinforcements to his vanquished army.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

Ras Adal retaliated by announcing his intention of invading the Sudan. Abdullah accepted the challenge by sending 87,000 men under Abu Angar and Zeki Tumal. A great battle was fought in August, 1887, at Defra Sin, 30 miles from Gondar. The Abyssinians were routed. The victors entered Gondar and sacked that town.¹

While the followers of the Khalifa were exulting over their victory and preparing to capitalize it by striking at Egypt, King Johannes of Abyssinia was vowing vengeance for the defeat of his troops at Defra Sin. But he was a crafty soul, and determined to get an insight into the Khalifa's forces before again taking up arms. He accordingly in April, 1888, sent an Abyssinian delegation to Omdurman nominally to pay obeisance to the Ansar leader, but in reality to reconnoitre the land. The report of these spies must have been encouraging, for King Johannes decided, shortly after their return, to capture Gallabat and advance on Omdurman. Metamma, the capital of Gallabat, was his first objective. It was held by 60,000 men, but, on 9th March, 1889, the Abyssinians surrounded and overwhelmed them. During the last stage of the fight, however, King Johannes was killed by a stray bullet. His army at once retired. The enemy harassed the Abyssinian retreat and captured the body of the dead sovereign. The net result of the action was that a victory became a rout.²

What may be called the Abyssinian interlude thus ended in the triumph of the Crescent over the Cross. It had taken the Khalifa, however, practically four years to dispose of the tenacious African Christians. Not only did he have to deal with this clog in his machinery, and not only was he confronted with those local uprisings in Darfur, Kordofan, and Dar Fertit already referred to, but Suakin on the Red Sea gave him trouble.

That port had not been included in the cession to Italy. It remained Egyptian, but it had practically

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

² *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

no hinterland. What it lacked in territorial extent it made up in the mettle of its Governor. In other words, in the days with which this narrative is concerned Lord Kitchener of Khartum, then Lieutenant-Colonel Kitchener, was "Governor-General of the Eastern Sudan and Red Sea littoral", "a magniloquent phrase", says his authorized biographer, "which, rendered into the idiom of strict fact, meant the command of the squalid little town and port of Suakin; for in those parts the Khedive's writ did not then run in the Eastern Sudan far outside its walls."¹

Kitchener's first thought had been to establish good relations with the local tribes. To the friendly he sent letters of encouragement. To the doubtful he wrote advising them, if they wanted peace and prosperity, to come in and see him at Suakin. The moment was propitious, as Osman Digna, after having kept the Sudan for three years in a ferment, had finally overreached himself. The tribes, which had once fervently embraced the Mahdist cause and had hurled themselves on the British and Egyptian square in 1884 and 1885, had begun to tire of Arab oppression. They found allegiance to the Khalifa an expensive luxury which cost them devastated crops and desolated villages.² Kitchener was thus able to get the tribes in the vicinage of Suakin to combine to overthrow Osman Digna, with the result that the latter's stronghold of Tamai was captured on 7th October, 1886, 200 of his men killed, and a vast store of rifles and ammunition captured.³

For about a year there was comparative quiet in the Eastern Sudan. Then at the end of 1887 Osman Digna again advanced toward Suakin, but his force at Taroi was routed by the "Friendlies" and he fell back on Handub. Early in 1888 Kitchener obtained permission from the Sirdar, Sir Francis Grenfell, to try what he could do against that place with "Friendlies", Irregulars, Police, and the few mounted

¹ *Life of Kitchener*, by Sir George Arthur, London, Macmillan (1921), i, 152.

² *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

³ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, xliith edition, s.v. Egypt, ix, 126.

men that were available. Regular infantry was ruled out, for if the coup did not come off, it was intended to avenge losses by a second expedition.

Kitchener's main wish was to capture Osman Digna. The Englishman recognized the force of the man, his ceaseless energy and contagious optimism. He knew that to capture so resourceful a chieftain would be no easy matter. In order to increase his chances of attaining his goal Kitchener smuggled into the heterogeneous mass which Sir Francis Grenfell authorized him to throw against Osman Digna a few Regulars of the 10th Sudanese.¹

Before dawn on 17th January a force of 450 set out for Handub. It included in its numbers some natives who had recently deserted Osman Digna and knew where he lived. Its orders were to make straight for his tent and attempt to capture him. The little band was successful in taking up its position and swept down upon the Ansars while they were reciting their morning prayers. In the confusion which followed the deserters made at once for the tent of Osman Digna and captured his horse before he had time to mount it. When his pursuers felt certain that their quarry was about to fall into their hands the undaunted Arab saw a camel which happened to be near him. Quick as a flash he threw himself upon it, and before anybody had time to think succeeded in making good his escape under the very nose of those who had been sent to effect his capture.

The Arabs soon recovered from the confusion caused by the suddenness of the assault and, seeing in the growing light how small was the force that had attacked them, turned upon their assailants. A short but sharp fight ensued. When the delay told Kitchener that something had gone wrong he hurried to the thick of the *mêlée* and succeeded in enforcing discipline among the disordered mob. While embroiled in the general retreat he was wounded in the jaw. Reeling in his saddle from loss of blood he merely stopped to bandage

¹ Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, 156.

up his wound with a policeman's cummerbund and continued to direct the operations.

The Ansars pursued the Government troops for six miles. Captain Hickman, on whom the command of the expedition devolved when Kitchener's wound finally incapacitated that gallant officer, handled the situation so successfully that he extricated his force with the loss of but ten men killed. Three officers and nineteen men were wounded. Amongst the wounded were some soldiers of the 10th Sudanese battalion whose presence in the force sent against Osman Digna was against Sir Francis Grenfell's orders. Their presence, which Kitchener and Hickman had hoped to have overlooked, was brought to light when the casualties were reported to Cairo.¹ Kitchener's biographer, Sir George Arthur, says that "Kitchener's wound, perhaps, saved him from the Sirdar's strictures".²

The great soldier's injury was reported as "a comminuted fracture of the right lower jaw—breathing and swallowing difficult—tonsils inflamed", and he was sent to Cairo. The Queen, who appointed him an aide-de-camp, demanded daily bulletins regarding his progress. It is too much to ask of military discipline to require that any commanding officer should severely criticize a subordinate for a technical infraction of a rule when it was known that his Sovereign was calling for daily reports about his health. But while this fight proved that Kitchener had won his Queen's appreciation and did his own thinking, Osman Digna was not captured. The expedition thus failed in its objective.

There is every reason to believe that Osman Digna returned to the scene as soon as he had shaken off his pursuers. It is quite probable that it was his leadership that caused the Arabs to rally after their first surprise. But whether he got back into the fray or not, it was his personality that dominated his followers. He was in many ways a most remarkable man. He may, perhaps, not have had that sublime faith in the Mahdi which made of Wad En Nejumi a veritable Muslim Bayard—

¹ Jackson, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

² Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, 157.

a *chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*—but he was, as Sir Reginald Wingate puts it, the inspiring leader of the Fuzzy-Wuzzies of Rudyard Kipling.

In appearance Osman Digna was the typical Arab of the *Thousand and One Nights*. Thick-set and of middle height, he was taciturn and seldom indulged in laughter. On the rare occasions when he was moved to mirth he would cover his mouth with his hand so that his merriment might be hidden from the spectator. His eyelashes were very thick. His forehead had a habit of wrinkling up when he became angry. His nose, partially aquiline, fell away and was inclined to be snub. When a young man there was something hawk-like in his appearance.¹

Osman was an orator. He knew how to lead a revivalist movement. Here is a sample of his eloquence which his biographer quotes on the authority of one who, often sorely against his will, listened for many years to the Ansar's weekly harangues :—

“Warriors of God's expected, leave your huts and join the holy cause : fight the holy fight : set out upon the road of God. Remove all gold ornaments from your womenfolk and dedicate them to the cause of the expected one. Be poor in the things of this world, for he who is poor in life will be rich and honoured on the day of Resurrection. These are the commands of the expected of God : The marriage dower for a virgin is ten dollars and for a widow no more than five dollars.”

“Kill all those who do not fight on your behalf. Take their possessions from them, even their women-kind, for they are lawful prey of God's elected. They may legally take to wife the women belonging to anyone who does not join the Mahdi's cause, even if she has not been divorced from her husband.”²

The women responded willingly to these appeals, screaming in the fervour of their emotional exaltation. Offerings of gold were freely made, to the intense disgust of sorrowing spouses who realized quite well that they would have to replace the ornaments, as soon as their

¹ Jackson, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

² *Ibid.*, p. 172.

wives recovered from the hypnotic effect of Osman Digna's appeal—only to give them up again when once more moved by his oratory.¹

In his speeches Osman Digna was wild and eloquent. His voice was deep and carried to the most distant of his audience. His hearers believed the most extravagant of his promises and saw nothing improbable in the wildest of his statements. "Fear not the issue of the battle," he would say, "for you are of even more account than the followers of the Prophet. In the days of Muhammad the warfare was simply one of spears and swords, and yet you see what they won! The troops of the Government are better armed than were the enemies of the Prophet. Your success will therefore be all the more glorious and your reward proportionately greater. When you see the hosts of the enemy, go straight towards them and attack them, even if you have no arms, not even so much as a club or a stick. . . . Bare your chest to meet your death; for you are True Believers, and if a bullet lays you low, then that shall be your great reward." ²

With such a man still at large it need hardly be said that fighting continued the whole year in the neighbourhood of Suakin. Abu Girga arrived but again retired. At last reinforcements were sent from Cairo, including a British contingent which consisted of the 20th Hussars, 21st Battalion King's Own Scottish Borderers, and 10th Battalion Welsh Regiment. Sir Francis Grenfell took personal command of the enlarged garrison. He signalized his leadership by a decisive action just outside the walls of Suakin, fought on 20th December, 1888. The Arabs were completely defeated and kept more or less quiet during the whole of 1889. Handub remained, nevertheless, in their hands. They held it throughout 1890.

All this fighting in the Eastern Sudan, coupled with the activity of the Abyssinians, meant that nothing but desultory skirmishing took place in the Nile Valley. Sir Evelyn Baring and his advisers had agreed upon

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

² *Ibid.*, p. 187.

a programme which was as definite as it was rational. It was to mark time and to permit British officers to evolve soldiers out of the raw material available in Egypt and in the Sudan. It need not be added that English strategy did not contemplate any aggressive action until this new force had been licked into shape. But when Colonel Chermside was attacked at Sarras on 28th April, 1887, this policy did not prevent him from counter-attacking with such conspicuous success that the Arabs were able to grasp that the quiescent attitude of the frontier force did not imply that its claws had been cut.

It looked for a while as if the Ansars were determined to wipe out this repulse by a more vigorous offensive. On 18th June an advance guard again attacked Sarras which, since the action of 28th April, had been reoccupied by the villagers. The Dervishes plundered the houses, carried off the women and all they could lay their hands on, and retired south, while the frightened inhabitants hurried to Wady Halfa. A permanent reoccupation of Sarras appeared to be imminent, when word from Omdurman ordered the principal emirs to assemble in general council. Trouble in Darfur and with the Abyssinians had become acute, and the garrisons of the northern posts of the Arabs had to be reduced in order to enable the Khalifa to meet the emergency with which he was thus confronted.¹

¹ Wingate, *op. cit.*, p. 321.

CHAPTER VI

THE BATTLE OF TOSKI

IT was not until May, 1889, that an invasion of Egypt on a large scale was attempted. The power and prestige of the Khalifa were then at their height. The rebellions in Darfur and Kordofan had been crushed. The Anti-Mahdi was dead. Even the defeat of the Ansars by the Abyssinians had been turned into a victory when a stray bullet killed King Johannes and permitted the Arabs to seize the body of that monarch and convert a rout into a triumph. The ideal hour had sounded for the attempt to drive the Egyptians and the English—the "Turks"—into the sea. And the Arabs had at their head their most incorrigible leader, the incorruptible Abderrahman Wad En Nejumi, the man whom Lord Milner calls the Gordon of Mahdiism.

The British leaders of the Egyptian army had known for months that this chieftain was mustering a large force for a descent on Lower Egypt. Early in 1889 circumstantial rumours told them that he was marching northwards from Dongola at the head of some 15,000 followers. But the stories that drifted in to the Khedivial headquarters all agreed that Wad En Nejumi had no intention of attempting to drive the Government forces off the Nile. All the spies were unanimous in holding that the plan of the redoubtable emir was to avoid Wady Halfa, by starting from a point on the west bank of the Nile opposite Sarras and striking across the desert to Bimban, a place on the river about 20 miles north of Asswan.¹

He had persuaded himself that when he reached Bimban, Egyptian rebels would flock to his standard. It was not his intention to offer battle until he had arrived at his goal. Accordingly, he kept at some little distance from the Nile. He counted, doubtless, on

¹ Milner, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

being able to obtain provisions, and above all water, from the villages along the bank. But a flying column, consisting of about half the Wady Halfa garrison, under Colonel Wodehouse, dogged his march and kept him from the river.

Had Wad En Nejumi been an ordinary man, this inability to get food or water would have forced him to retrace his steps. But he was not made of common clay. He was a fearless fanatic. Deprivation, thirst, and hunger meant nothing to him. He inoculated his followers with his own enthusiasm. Across the desert they trekked, living on practically nothing but religious exaltation and sustained by practically nothing but hope. Had they been able to get their horses and donkeys and camels to accept so ethereal a diet, they would have accomplished the impossible.

Unspeakable contempt for the Egyptians encouraged Wad En Nejumi as he led his army across the burning sands. He had been taunted by the Khalifa for his inaction during the preceding years. He had confidence in his men and they in him. He had annihilated Hicks and had captured Khartum. Why should he fear an enemy that did not fear God? His emirs were all picked officers. He had denuded the country of supplies as he pushed forward to the north. He knew that he would obtain nothing from the south. The desert which surrounded him could not feed him and his thousands. Already many of his horses, donkeys, and camels had been sacrificed to defeat starvation.¹ Allah had carried them so far. The God of Hosts would sustain them to the end. The Promised Land was but a few miles ahead and nought but worthless soldiers barred their access to it. And never doubting, never hesitating, never questioning, onward they dragged themselves until Sarras was reached on 22nd June. There, another contingent under Abdel Halim joined Wad En Nejumi. On the 28th the combined force reached Matuka.

From the hill overlooking this latter place the outpost

¹ Wingate, *op. cit.*, p. 404.

forts at Khor and Mussa were clearly visible. The lines of Wady Halfa were discernible on the horizon. And, as Wad En Nejumi's eye spotted the Egyptian frontier station, he took a solemn oath that ere long the horse he rode should be tethered in the stable of the Government commandant. Nothing could induce him, when so near his enemy, to make straight for the river and attempt to reach Wady Halfa by following its banks. He determined, on the contrary, to adhere to the sands he knew so well and to march parallel with the Nile and not descend to the villages. Adhering to this plan, he was able on the 30th to reconnoitre the forts of Khor and Mussa.

Meanwhile the Egyptian army had not been idle. English officers controlled its strategy. It was known to them that Wad En Nejumi might seek to follow up this reconnaissance by an immediate advance. Colonel Wodehouse accordingly left Wady Halfa at dawn on the following morning. With him were two gunboats towing barges carrying 500 men of the 10th Sudanese Battalion and 250 of the 9th Sudanese, together with a battery of four 6 cm. Krupp guns. Cavalry, at the same time, crossed to the left bank. Finding that the Ansars had not attempted to advance, Colonel Wodehouse returned to Wady Halfa the same evening. A few hours later came the news that Wad En Nejumi was moving northward and that the village of Argin, about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Wady Halfa, was his immediate objective. A flying column was at once made up to meet this emergency. It was composed of—

Two squadrons of cavalry, 200 men,
 Artillery { Six 6 cm. Krupp, 2nd Field Battery,
 Two 8 cm. Krupp, 3rd Garrison Battery,
 Two companies Camel Corps, 120 men,
 9th Sudanese Battalion, 520 men,
 10th Sudanese Battalion, 520 men,
 13th Sudanese Battalion, 550 men,
 Medical Corps, 32 men,
 in all some 1,940 men.¹

¹ Ibid., p. 406.

Barely had the sun set on 1st July when the whole of Wad En Nejumi's force, men, women, children, horses, donkeys, and camels, streamed out of Matuka. It is estimated that there were 5,000 fighting men and upwards of 8,000 camp followers, comprising the wives and families of the warriors and a mass of impressed Donagla and others who had been swept along as the army had advanced through their country.¹

Colonel Wodehouse kept his eyes on this force. He saw the emirs plant their banners on the hill-tops to mark their positions. Observing that they then began to descend in considerable numbers towards the north end of the village, he instructed his artillery and the 10th Sudanese Battalion to open fire on the Ansars. The result was a sharp engagement in which the invading host lost about 900 men killed, among whom were several important emirs. The Egyptian casualties were 4 officers killed and 66 men killed and wounded.²

This decisive result dispirited many of Wad En Nejumi's lieutenants. Abdel Halim, his second-in-command, took up the cudgels for those who wanted to retreat. He had been wounded in the action and saw defeat staring him in the face. He argued that it was futile to attempt an invasion of Egypt with insufficient men, no food, and great difficulties in obtaining water.

Wad En Nejumi would not listen to such words. He assembled his entire force and harangued his men. He told them that they were fighting a holy war and for a holy cause; that those who died for Allah would go straight to Paradise and that all of them knew what joys there awaited them. He did not deny that the undertaking was fraught with difficulty and danger. He acknowledged that it must inevitably end in the death of those who remained faithful, but, drawing his sword and flourishing it, he exclaimed that he for one would never desist from the holy undertaking. And looking his emirs straight in the eye, he concluded:—

"I fear that there may be some among you who fain would go back home disgraced before Allah and His

¹ *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

² *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

Prophet. Those of you who fear not contumely may leave. No one will hinder your departure. But those of you who desire to remain may rest assured that I will lead you, if not to victory, at all events to happiness unmeasured in a future life."¹

So stirring were his words, so full of fanatical ardour was the man, so great his hold over the mob psychology of those who heard him, that many who had clamoured to be led back now came forward to say that they were ready to follow their chief to the end. Five hundred, more headstrong than the rest, however, made their way unmolested back to Matuka and thence southwards.²

As soon as Cairo had learned that Wad En Nejumi was advancing, reinforcements were despatched from Asswan to Wady Halfa. They consisted of the 1st and 2nd Egyptian Battalions, the Egyptian Horse Battery, a Mule Battery, and two squadrons of cavalry. On 5th July the Sirdar, Major-General Sir Francis Grenfell, and his staff left Cairo for the scene of action, after having made arrangements for a British brigade to be hurried to the South.³

One of the first things that the Sirdar learned when he assumed personal charge of operations was that the thousands of camp-followers in Wad En Nejumi's army were dying of starvation and that the soldiers themselves hardly had enough to eat to keep body and soul together. The numbers of camels, horses, and donkeys were rapidly diminishing, as they constituted almost the sole food of the invaders. But these emaciated beasts were reserved for the fighting men, and the miserable wives, children, and servants subsisted as best as they could on an insufficient supply of powdered date-seeds and the core of date-palm trees. It was obvious that the parching sun and the destruction of the last animals would soon wipe out every man, woman, and child in that vast horde. But Sir Francis Grenfell could not bring himself to annihilate an enemy by such means. He was fighting the battle of civilization against barbarism. Instead of allowing the inexorable laws of

¹ Ibid., p. 412.

² Ibid., p. 413.

³ Ibid., loc. cit.

nature to destroy his foe or pressing forward to attack him when his powers of resistance were reduced, the heroic Briton on 16th July sent a trusted messenger with a letter addressed to Wad En Nejumi. It read :—

“ This letter, Wad En Nejumi, is to tell you that after my commander, Wodehouse Pasha, has informed me of what has happened, I have come here to see with my own eyes the state of affairs. I am followed by thousands and thousands of English and Egyptian troops, who are now on their way up the river; and I had thought to have swept you and your followers off the face of the earth, for you have taken the property of defenceless people, seizing their women and children, destroying their country and their lands and making famine and desolation in a land which before was happy and prosperous. Know, then, it was our intention utterly to destroy you, but behold when I came here I find that you are a poor and weakly crowd, dying of hunger and thirst.

“ I know that you personally have been the victim of a base jealousy imposed upon you by the False Khalifa, who had put his own nephew Yunis into the post you formerly occupied, and then, to get rid of you and the Arabs whom he cannot trust, he has ordered you to take Egypt, a task which is as impossible for you as to hide the sun from lighting the world. . . . You wish to reach Bimban, where you think that the inhabitants are friendly to you. Bimban is hundreds of miles from you, and over long and waterless deserts ; and even if ever you should succeed in reaching there, you would find an army of English and Egyptian troops ready to receive you.

“ To turn back from where you are is impossible, for the garrisons of Halfa will cut off your retreat, and now there is nothing left for you but to die of hunger and thirst in the desert.

“ But again I tell you that I have seen your pitiable state. Know that our Government is a humane government, and does not wish the death of the helpless women and children who are with you. I therefore summon

you to surrender and give yourselves up. If you do so, your life, the lives of your emirs, and the lives of all those who are with you will be spared. This I promise you on the word of an English general ; but if you refuse to surrender, then know that you will be utterly destroyed. I therefore send you this letter, that you may choose which you will do.

" May God guide you in your decision.

" Let me have your answer by bearer.

" (signed)

" F. GRENFELL,

" Sirdar.

" Belanga, 16th May, 1889." ¹

Sir Francis Grenfell knew in his heart of hearts that Wad En Nejumi was not the man to surrender, even if death stared him in the face. The Sirdar based his only hope of success upon his ability to detach from his uncompromising foe those lieutenants whose eyes were not blind to the inevitable. A separate letter was therefore sent to each of the Ansar's emirs. It read :—

" I send you a copy of a letter I have sent to your leader, Wad En Nejumi. Judge for yourself what you will do, and may God guide your decision. If you wish to surrender and save your life and the lives of those who are with you, then give me an answer by bearer that you will surrender. If you send no answer, then I will know that you do not wish to surrender, and the blood of the helpless people will be on your head." ²

When Wad En Nejumi received the letter addressed to him he assembled his emirs. As soon as all of them were gathered round him, he read every word of the communication slowly, deliberately, and in an audible voice. When he had finished he remained silent for a few seconds and then, drawing his sword, swore the triple oath which binds the inner conscience of the True Believer that he would never surrender. His emirs followed his example and a noisy scene ensued. When the news spread through the camp, vehement protestations against capitulation were unanimous. Everybody

¹ Ibid., p. 417.

² Ibid., p. 418.

appeared to be eager to fight. Yet Wad En Nejumi seems to have deceived no one. He told his followers that victory would not crown their banners, but that a Martyr's death would open for them the portals of Paradise. And, true to his attitude at Argin, he invited those who desired to do so to take advantage of the Sirdar's offer. So great was Wad En Nejumi's moral ascendancy over the starving thousands that not a single man, woman, or child surrendered, although they knew that their last chance of escape had gone.¹

So convinced was Wad En Nejumi that his warriors would support him that without a moment's notice he disappeared from the throng and, seeking the seclusion of his tent, wrote the following reply to the Sirdar's letter.

"In the name of the Merciful and Almighty God, and prayers on our Master Muhammad and his followers.

"From the servant of his Lord, who relies on God, Abderrahman En Nejumi.

"To the Sirdar Grenfell Pasha, may God lead him in the right way. Peace be to those who follow the right, fear their God, and prevent themselves from becoming ambitious.

"We inform you that your letter in which you tell of your arrival and of the cause of your coming up here, has reached us ; we have also noted your endless statements and beliefs, and therefore inform you that we are sent by his holiness to preach to all people, including Muslims, and have been protected by the mercy of God in Mahdism, and to occupy the whole country and convert its inhabitants.

"We are not only marching to Bimban, as you have stated, but intend to take the whole country and, through the help of God, to convert the people. Therefore, those who believe and leave all matters in the hands of God, His Prophet (prayers and peace on him) and His Khalifa (blessings be on him), and give up all arms and ammunitions, themselves, their property and children will be safe ; what we have will be theirs, and they

¹ Ibid., p. 420.

will share our fate ; but those who refuse us, follow their ambition and insist on resisting, let them know that the sword is alive, and God will judge between us and them. (He is the best judge.) . . .

“ As regards what you say about the large number of your army, and the approach of its arrival, etc., that does not frighten us. We are not afraid of any one. We only fear God. We do not even fear the *Thakalain*.

“ Before this, we were carefully awaiting a chance to fight you, and as God has now relieved us from the tyranny of your governors, let it therefore be known to you that we still insist on fighting and destroying you, leaving none of you on the face of the earth who does not embrace our beliefs and meet the wishes of God. Take this as a real fact and do not be deceived by the large number of your troops, your guns, shell and powder, while the help of God is far from you.

“ It is quite sufficient for you that your chiefs, Gordon, Hicks, and others, were destroyed with numerous armies, arms, and equipment. . . . There is no power nor strength but in God. We rely on Him.”¹

Such an answer left the Sirdar no alternative. A British brigade was sent upstream, but General Grenfell, who had previously concentrated his Egyptian forces at Toski, found Wad En Nejumi attempting, on 3rd August, to cross his front. The Englishman, therefore, attacked the Ansar without waiting for the British, whose advance parties had reached Korosko. The forces which the Sirdar brought into action were 4 Sudanese battalions, 2 Egyptian battalions, and 1 squadron of the 20th Hussars (British).²

“ I visited the battle-field of Toski a few months later,” wrote Lord Cromer. “ Many of the Dervish dead were still unburied. The empty cartridge cases, which were strewn about, showed clearly the positions which had been occupied by the Egyptian troops. It would be difficult to conceive ground better calculated to give disciplined, well-armed, and well-equipped troops every

¹ Ibid., p. 419.

² *The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*, i, 253.

possible advantage over hordes of courageous but ill-disciplined savages. The soil of the desert which is here undulating is composed of hard, shingly sand, over which infantry, cavalry, and artillery can move with ease and rapidity. Here and there a few rocks and boulders, behind which shelter can be obtained, rise up from the plain. Save, however, in these localities the ground is completely bare. Once driven from the shelter of the rocks, it was clear that the arms of precision with which the Egyptian soldiers were furnished would work deadly effect on the Dervishes. Sir Francis Grenfell, therefore, with the eye of a true tactician, determined to bring on an action at once. . . . It was evident to Nejumi that he had to accept Sir Francis Grenfell's challenge. He gave his followers an Arab version of Nelson's order at Trafalgar, 'We must all,' he said, 'stand prepared to meet our Maker to-day.'"¹

They were. The issue was not in doubt for an instant. After the fighting had gone on for some little time the Arabs began to retreat towards the hills. Suddenly a solitary rider was seen galloping towards the retiring Ansars, evidently attempting to rally them. A prisoner indicated to the Sirdar that this was Wad En Nejumi. The order was at once given the cavalry to charge. Soon not a man of the invaders remained in the plain. The intrepid leader was severely wounded and his horse shot, but he managed to reach the shelter of the hills.

During the artillery attack on the second position, a well-directed shot brought down the largest banner, which was subsequently discovered to be Wad En Nejumi's. The shell which broke the flag pole wounded him a third time—his first wound was received just as the battle began.² When it was discovered that his condition was serious he was carefully tended by his body-guard, who, placing him on a rough camel-litter, attempted to carry him to the rear.³

The heavy fighting had more or less ceased when the

¹ Cromer, *op. cit.*, ii, 69.

² Wingate, *op. cit.*, p. 431 ; see also note same page regarding first wound.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

Government forces discovered what was supposed to be a camel carrying a gun and surrounded by some men. A troop of cavalry fired on the party. The camel fell, and most of the men appeared to have been killed. The horsemen then rode up and called on the remainder to surrender. As they approached, the "dead" Arabs suddenly came to life and attacked the cavalry. A hand-to-hand encounter ensued. A number were killed, and the remainder returned to their fallen camel. They were again called upon to surrender. Their only response was a second charge. It resulted in all of them being killed except one man, who seized a passing horse and escaped. The cavalry then attempted to find the gun which the camel had been carrying. It was soon found that the burden of the ship of the desert had been not a field-piece but a man. That man was all that was mortal of Wad En Nejumi. One of his sons, a child five years old, was found dead by his father's side, while another baby boy scarcely a year old was brought by his nurse into camp at Toski on the following day.¹

"Of all the sons of earth," said Lord Cromer, "few have had their destiny more completely changed by accident than this child. Instead of being brought up to detest Christians amidst savage surroundings in the Sudan, he was handed over to the tender care of the English nursing sisters at the principal hospital at Cairo, by whom he was a good deal more spoilt, and who were more devoted and certainly more willing slaves to him than any of those whom his father could have captured in the centre of Africa."²

The Egyptian losses in the engagement were but 25 killed and 140 wounded. Sir Reginald Wingate estimates that the Arabs left over 1,200 dead on the field; 4,000 prisoners were taken, and 147 standards captured.³ The headlong flight of the remaining Ansars southwards for over 140 miles enabled the Anglo-Egyptian forces to push forward the frontier of Egypt to Sarras, a distance of 30 miles.⁴

¹ Ibid., loc. cit.

² Wingate, op. cit., p. 439.

³ Cromer, op. cit., ii, 71.

⁴ Archer, op. cit., i, 164.

This signal victory over the intrepid, but misguided, Wad En Nejumi meant far more than the mere addition of a few square miles to the territory over which the Khedive reigned. It implied that the Khalifa had shot his bolt. It ended his threat of the conquest of the world. It did not necessarily prove that he was not invincible in his remote and inhospitable desert ; but it demonstrated that as an aggressive factor he was not to be feared. And it gave Europe confidence in the ability of civilization to withstand the shock of barbarism. It showed that under English leadership, and supported by Sudanese battalions, the Egyptian *fellah* was a good soldier.

CHAPTER VII

THE EASTERN SUDAN

THE Eastern Sudan, as a whole, knew nothing of law and order during 1889 and 1890. Kitchener and his successors bore the title of "Governor-General of the Eastern Sudan and Red Sea Littoral", but the Khedive's writ did not run beyond the confines of the town of Suakin. Osman Digna, who represented the Khalifa in those parts, was even more impotent. His influence had sunk below par. Inter-tribal friction had increased; raiding and brigandage were rife; chaos devastated the land.

Cairo was fully aware of these impossible conditions. Kitchener's Intelligence Service was excellent, and he always kept Sir Evelyn Baring accurately and regularly informed of what was transpiring. Matters were allowed to drift until the British Consul-General was empowered by London to adopt a policy and then to work towards its execution. In other words, during those months a lengthy controversy took place as to whether it was desirable to prohibit or to permit trade with the interior.¹

There were two points of view, both of which had strong advocates. The military authorities argued that if grain were allowed to leave the coast it could not be prevented from reaching the adherents of the Khalifa. The partisans of this theory also brought out that under cover of legitimate trade munitions of war would find their way into the enemy's hands. On the other hand, it was insisted that the Ansars were few in number, that they tyrannized over the majority of the inhabitants, and that it was unjust to throttle trade and punish the many for the faults of the few.

"A policy, which was almost prohibitive of trade, as also one which placed no hindrance on trade," writes

¹ Cromer, *op. cit.*, II, 73.

Lord Cromer, "were, therefore, supported with an equal degree of conviction by competent authorities. Under these circumstances, the course of action dictated from Cairo was necessarily vacillating. At times trade was allowed ; at other times it was wholly, or in part, prohibited." ¹

While the pendulum was thus swinging back and forth and anarchy was gaining the upper hand, the perennial slave trade problem once again came to the fore. The British Navy, which policed the seas and ruled the waves, found itself unable to stop the crossing to Arabia of the various *dhow*s which specialized in carrying human chattels. These single-masted little vessels hid in creeks where larger ships could not enter and slipped across to the Red Sea when the coast was clear. The slave caravans awaited them a short distance inland. The first favourable opportunity was grasped, the black ivory brought down to the shore and embarked at sunset. By the following morning, with a fair wind, the *dhow* was within sight of the opposite shore. The British navy thus found itself as impotent in dealing with slave-runners as the American Prohibition flotilla lately appeared to be in preventing alcohol from entering the United States.

Sir Evelyn Baring at once saw that the best way to deal with this situation was to occupy Tokar, which he calls the granary of the Eastern Sudan. His training as a soldier also convinced him that the capture of that stronghold would relieve the pressure upon Suakin, as Osman Digna would thus be cut off from his base of supplies. In other words, the solution of the problems confronting the Eastern Sudan depended, in his opinion, upon planting the Khedivial flag at Tokar, and keeping it there.

But, in those early days, Sir Evelyn Baring was not a free agent. A Liberal Cabinet had called him to Cairo. The Conservatives were then in office. They trusted him, but did not then give him *carte blanche*. He therefore had to watch his step. No diplomatist

¹ Ibid., loc. cit.

in the field likes to give advice unless he feels that there is a fair prospect of its being followed. Baring knew that any offensive campaign in the Eastern Sudan by the Egyptian army would be viewed with great dislike in England. He therefore refrained at first from advising that Tokar be reoccupied. When, however, the necessity for this step finally appeared to him to be more than clear, he submitted his views to London in the spring of 1890.

Lord Salisbury was at that time in charge of the Foreign Office. He was not a Little Englander. He had the moral courage to employ force whenever he was convinced that it was necessary. Before sanctioning its employment, however, he wished to be convinced that the adoption of such a course was both imperative and desirable. He invariably discounted military arguments. He at once wrote to Baring :—

“I would not be too much impressed by what the soldiers tell you about the strategic importance of those places. It is their way. If they were allowed full scope, they would insist on the importance of garrisoning the moon in order to protect them from Mars.”¹

A statesman who held such views was not the man who would be prone to approve of an offensive campaign in the Eastern Sudan. We are not, therefore, astonished to note that on 29th March, 1890, Lord Salisbury wrote to Sir Evelyn Baring :—

“The arguments against taking Tokar appear to me to be that the operations must involve some money, and may involve very much, and that the finances of Egypt, though no longer in an embarrassed condition, are only convalescent, and a very slight imprudence might throw them back into the condition from which they have been so painfully and laboriously drawn. Again, when once you have permitted a military advance, the extent of that military advance scarcely remains within your discretion. It is always open to the military authorities to discover in the immediate vicinity of the area to which your orders confine them, some danger

¹ Ibid., ii, 75.

against which it is absolutely necessary to guard, some strategic position whose invaluable qualities will repay ten times any risk or cost that its occupation may involve. You have no means of arguing against them."¹

It suggests itself, however, that the real reason why the Marquess of Salisbury vetoed Sir Evelyn Baring's request was that public opinion in England was not yet ripe for aggressive action in the Sudan. The disasters of Gordon's days made the man in the street timid. He instinctively shrank from any proposal to advance into the Egyptian desert. But, as months passed and the Salisbury Cabinet became more solidly entrenched in the good graces of the electorate, Downing Street listened to reason. It finally telegraphed to its Cairo representative on 7th February, 1891, that the Government sanctioned the occupation of Tokar.

Sir Reginald Wingate infers that even at this late date the British Cabinet would probably have been reluctant to authorize this expedition if it had not been known that Osman Digna had temporarily left the Eastern Sudan. He was the personification of the power of the Khalifa in the vicinage of Suakin. He may have been a tyrant, cordially hated by the tribes of the neighbourhood, but, as the poet said—

“One blast upon his bugle horn
Were worth a thousand men.”

He had departed for a somewhat remote region known as the Habah country. With him were most of his fighting men. His exact intentions were unknown. It was believed that he was proceeding on a tax-collecting expedition, and that he would probably be absent some weeks.

Colonel Holled-Smith, who had succeeded Kitchener as Governor-General of Suakin, had followed his predecessor's example and maintained a good secret service. He thus knew of Osman Digna's movements and of the probable duration of his absence. He felt that no better opportunity could ever present itself for attacking

¹ Ibid., p. 75 (note).

Tokar. He put his ideas into the shape of a telegram, dated 15th January, 1891, and they appear to have convinced Sir Evelyn Baring and to have converted Lord Salisbury.¹

While London was still ruminating over the advisability of seizing the golden occasion stressed by Holled-Smith, the post at Handub, near Suakin, was proving more and more troublesome. Using that centre as a base the Ansars, unrestrained perhaps by Osman Digna's wise circumspection, began to raid the Arabs who were more or less friendly to the Government. So insistent did these harassing tactics become that on 26th January Captain Beech was instructed to lead the Egyptian cavalry in an assault upon the outskirts of Handub. He captured forty-two marauders. Barely had he returned to Suakin when news reached headquarters that another raiding expedition was carrying off cattle.

This defiant attitude forced Holled-Smith to attack and capture Handub itself. The taking of that stronghold gave universal satisfaction to the neighbouring tribes. It showed that the warriors left behind by Osman Digna had no leader of his mettle. The result was that London probably learned from these stern realities that Sir Evelyn Baring was right when he said that the moment had come to establish law and order in the Eastern Sudan by driving the Khalifa's forces out of Tokar.

When, on 8th February, word reached Colonel Holled-Smith that the British Government approved of the advance on Tokar, the Egyptian troops centred at Suakin were ready for action. They consisted of 1,500 infantry, 100 cavalry, 2 field and 2 mountain guns. Relief battalions were ordered from Cairo and from Asswan to aid in garrisoning Suakin and supplying reinforcements. No time was lost in pushing forward the contingent by sea. On 11th February, Trinkitat was occupied by the 4th Egyptian and 11th Sudanese battalion. Colonel Holled-Smith and his staff followed on the 13th.

¹ Wingate, *op. cit.*, p. 493.

One day later came the 12th Sudanese battalion, and one company of the 1st Egyptian battalion. A force of 500 friendly Arabs was also instructed to proceed by land to Temerein.¹

But valuable time was lost while Colonel Holled-Smith had been educating the Egyptian Government in regard to the necessity of striking while the iron was hot. Osman Digna learned of what had transpired at Handub. He did not cross his arms and say that it was Allah's will that that place should be lost to the Khalifa. On the contrary, he left at once for the north with 100 horsemen, 1,800 sword and spearmen, and 100 Sudanese armed with rifles. It was his intention to raise the tribes on the road and retake his lost stronghold. He reached Taroi on the 13th, and should have been ready to attack Handub on the 15th.

When near this latter place a messenger reached Osman Digna from the Emir of Alafit with a letter which said that steamers had arrived at Trinkitat conveying "thousands of English and Egyptians". The indefatigable Ansar did not hesitate an instant. He at once retraced his steps and returned to Alafit via Taroi and Setirah.

In the meantime, the Egyptian expeditionary force had established itself at El Teb. On the morning of 18th February the troops prepared for the final stage of their advance, when a dense sand-storm blew up and immobilized the column. Spies were sent out to obtain what information they could while the rank and file waited for the clouds to clear. A shot soon rang out in the thickening veil of sand. In a few moments the scouts came back bringing in a prisoner and the saddle of a man who had been killed. It was thus evident that a hostile force was near, but details were wanting in regard to its numbers, composition, and leadership. The intelligence officers accordingly took the captured man in hand, and while the wind blew and the sand became thicker and thicker, cross-examined him for four weary hours in an attempt to obtain news.

¹ Ibid., p. 495.

"Threats and cajolery," wrote Jackson, "alike proved unavailing for a time, but at length the prisoner was induced to speak, and said, so far from Osman Digna being present at Tokar with an insignificant following, there were 7,000 men under his command ready at Alafit to attack Colonel Holled-Smith."¹

The seriousness of the situation impressed itself upon Sir Reginald (then Major) Wingate. He was the officer who had obtained the truth from the prisoner. He urged that, enveloped as they were in an impenetrable cloud of sand, they should permit him to reconnoitre with a few friendlies and a squadron under Major Beech. If there were a large body of the enemy at Alafit, as Wingate believed, the scouts would be able to locate them or, at all events, give warning of their presence, if suddenly attacked in the thick scrub.

The little party went on ahead. It located the Ansars between Tokar and Alafit. A few shots were exchanged. Wingate then returned with all speed with his detachment and located the Government forces "standing at ease, unconscious of 7,000 Dervishes less than a mile away".² Suddenly the air cleared and the banners of the Arabs rose as it were from the earth only 1,500 yards distant.

The attack developed with dramatic swiftness. The Government troops were hastily brought into action. Their camels formed the centre of their square. The fighting was fast and furious. The Ansars displayed their usual intrepidity and dash. English training had metamorphosed the Egyptian army. The Khedivial troops no longer allowed themselves to be slaughtered like sheep. They did not attempt to flee, but held their ground. Their superior armament and their discipline brought fruit. The result of the battle was never for a moment in doubt. The Arabs were defeated with a loss of 700 killed, including 17 of their chieftains.³ The Egyptian casualties amounted to 10 killed and

¹ Jackson, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

² *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

³ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

48 wounded. Upwards of fifty Ansar standards and a large quantity of arms of all sorts were taken.¹

Fate decreed that Tokar should be recaptured and the Egyptian flag hoisted over the ruined government building on the anniversary of its fall seven years earlier. This coincidence recalls the fact that General Valentine Baker, in describing his defeat at El Teb, on the road to Tokar, on 5th February, 1885, wrote :—

“Marched yesterday morning with three thousand five hundred towards Tokar. . . . On square being only threatened by a small force of enemy, certainly less than a thousand strong, Egyptian troops threw down their arms and ran, allowing themselves to be killed without slightest resistance. More than two thousand killed. All material lost.”

Colonel Holled-Smith, on the other hand, thus reported his victory of Alafit, on the road to Tokar, on 19th February, 1891 :—

“The main body of the dervishes were fifty yards from our front line, and were extending to the right and left to envelop the position. The bulk of their force was directed against the line occupied by the 12th battalion, their attack being pushed home with their usual intrepidity and fearlessness. The troops, however, stood their ground and did not yield one inch throughout the line.”

It is with pardonable pride that Viscount Milner draws from this deadly parallel the deduction that this is no accidental contrast. “The same attacking enemy—adroit, sudden, and absolutely fearless”; he writes, “the same region of storm-swept desert and treacherous scrub, save that at El Teb the ground was comparatively open, while at Alafit the ambush-sheltering mimosa bushes, ten feet high, came close up to the line of march; the same human material on the side of Egypt—for there were no British soldiers, officers excepted, at Alafit, any more than at El Teb—yet how different the result! And this is no accidental contrast.”²

¹ Wingate, *op. cit.*, p. 502.

² Milner, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

In 1884 the Egyptians had allowed themselves to be killed without offering the slightest resistance. The Dervishes had remained masters of the field. In 1891 the Egyptians had fought like tigers. The Ansars fled from the carnage. But they were not cowards. They re-formed on some distant sand-hills. A second battle seemed to be imminent. A shell fired from one of the guns dispersed the gathering, and Wingate and Beech, with a small reconnaissance party, warily approached Alafit. The town was known to have a population of about 20,000 souls, but there was no sign of life.

The advance guard made its way to the centre of the place. No one appeared. It pressed forward to the praying-square, and apparently from nowhere a grey-beard appeared upon the scene. Lifting an emaciated hand above his head the old man asked : "Is it peace?" "It is peace," said Major Wingate. Twice was the query put. Twice was it answered. The old *sheikh* finally appeared to be convinced, and then, expanding his lungs to the utmost, he screeched "Peace!" as loud as he could.

"At the sound," says Jackson, "men, women and children, hens, sheep and goats, poured forth from the silent huts, as if at the waving of a conjurer's wand. In a few moments the camp became a humming hive of activity. Women set themselves about their household tasks, grinding their millet and relighting their hastily extinguished fires. The fighting men surrendered, and only a few of Osman Digna's personal followers were still sufficiently irreconcilable to remain by the side of their defeated leader."¹

Osman Digna escaped, making his way with difficulty to Temerein and thence to Adarama. The province of Kassala was his goal. Many of his followers died of starvation, and were reduced to eating the figs of the wild sycamores and any grasses that they could find by the wayside.

The Tokar expedition was thus a complete success.

¹ Jackson, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

It accomplished for the Eastern Sudan what Toski had done for the Valley of the Nile. It cleared the land of the followers of the Khalifa. It enabled the work of the civilian reformer to commence. The Egyptian question thus entered a new phase, and with it the problem of the Sudan took on a new orientation. A regenerated Egypt sprang into being. No attempt was made to extend the frontiers of the Khedivial authority; on the contrary, they were permitted to remain unchanged for a series of years. Attention was centred upon internal reforms. Lord Cromer attributes the magnificent results which have made modern Egypt one of the most prosperous countries in the world to "the fact that through good and evil report, the policy of withdrawing from the Sudan and adhering to a strictly defensive attitude on the Egyptian frontier was steadily maintained for some years".¹

¹ Cromer, *op. cit.*, ii, 78.

CHAPTER VIII

GETTING READY

TEN years elapsed between Ginnis and the first movements of the expedition for the reconquest of the Sudan. This decade was a dreary one. Drudgery was its watchword, hardships the order of the day, and privation the routine of life. Lord Cromer had been a soldier before he became a diplomatist. He had also served for a short while as England's representative on the Egyptian *Caisse de la Dette*. This made him a specialist in curtailing expenses. He became a veritable watchdog of the Fisc, ever on the look-out to husband a piastre for the Khedivial Exchequer. The result was that "the British officer was deprived of his leave and the Egyptian private of his rations, that a few pounds might be saved to the Egyptian Treasury. The clothing of the battalions," continues Mr. Winston Churchill, in *The River War*, "wore thin and threadbare, and sometimes their boots were so bad that the soldiers' feet bled from the cutting edges of the rocks, and the convoy escorts left their trails behind them".¹

It may be feared that a measure of exaggeration has crept into these words. Lord Cromer was too great a statesman to have converted economy into parsimony. And one is tempted to doubt the reliability of criticism which equates denying furlough to an officer with depriving a private of rations. But, however this may be, the fact stands out that service in the Khedivial army was not a lark. The Egyptian Treasury received a pound in value for every twenty shillings it spent on its reorganized fighting machine. The force improved in efficiency, and the constant alarms began to produce, even among the *fellaheen* infantry, first-class soldiers.

The Sudanese recruit possessed two outstanding

¹ *The River War*, by Winston Spencer Churchill, London, Longmans (1902), p. 94.

military virtues : the faithful loyalty of a dog and the heart of a lion. He loved his officers. He feared nothing. The obvious improvement in the Egyptian raw material and the soldierly instincts of the Sudanese "Sambo" encouraged the British officer as he sweltered at God-forsaken Wady Halfa. He knew that sooner or later an opportunity would be given him to annihilate the declining power of the Khalifa. It was Sir Evelyn Wood who had created this new spirit ; it was Sir Francis Grenfell who consolidated it. It was understood, however, that the Sirdar was anxious to return home. No one could tell to whom his command would be surrendered, but everyone knew that the new chief would find an incomparable engine of war when he should take over the throttle.

It was generally expected that the honour would be conferred upon Colonel Wodehouse. He had been for several years in command of a large force in continual contact with the enemy. He had won the battle of Argin. He was generally referred to as "the Conqueror of Wad En Nejumi". He had conducted the civil administration of the frontier province with conspicuous success. In a word, he had seniority, ability, and personality. But he was not chosen. Lord Cromer turned the scales against him.

The Proconsul threw his influence into the scale in favour of Horatio Herbert Kitchener, the eldest son of a Lieutenant-Colonel, then 42 years of age. It was as a Royal Engineer that the new Sirdar had obtained his commission in the spring of 1871. For the first ten years of his career he had remained an obscure officer, performing his duties with regularity, but giving no promise of the talent and character which he was afterwards to display. In 1874 some strange fatality led him to seek employment in the surveys which were then being made in Cyprus and Palestine. In the latter country he learned Arabic. Few British officers then knew that language. The tongue interested him. He acquired a working knowledge of it. It might have been thought that he was storing his mind

with something that could have no possible bearing upon his career. But man proposes and God disposes.

In 1882 the Arabi rebellion called the British fleet to Alexandria. Young Kitchener was at that time in Cyprus. He read the handwriting on the wall. He did not neglect his opportunity, and determined to capitalize his knowledge of Arabic. Securing leave of absence, he hurried to the scene of the crisis. But it appears that he, the strictest of disciplinarians, infringed military regulations by doing so. It is, perhaps, better that Sir George Arthur, Lord Kitchener's authorized biographer, should be allowed to tell this story. Here are his words :—

“Just when everybody in Cyprus was on the look-out for the seething Egyptian pot to boil over, the High Commissioner in his summer camp was asked by Kitchener—who had been ill with fever at Nicosia—for a week's leave, which was granted. Kitchener, making no secret of his trip and unconscious of transgressing any rule, took the next boat to Alexandria, where the fatal riot occurred on the day he landed. He accidentally missed his return boat from Alexandria to Cyprus, and Sir Beauchamp Seymour, commanding the Mediterranean Fleet, telegraphed for an extension of his leave. This the High Commissioner flatly refused—the officer was absent without leave, and must return by the first opportunity.”¹

No explanation is given as to how the young man “accidentally missed his return boat”. He was not sky-larking. On the contrary, he was on his Master's business. In fact, the chief item of a busy week at Alexandria was a neat little bit of reconnaissance work under Colonel Tulloch, who was attached to the flagship.

It appears that after Arabi's retirement towards Cairo there was some question regarding the best road for an advance on the capital. Tulloch had very well-defined opinions on the subject. He wanted, however, to eliminate the possibility of error. He was forming his plans when a tall young man entered his cabin,

¹ Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, 47.

announcing himself as Lieutenant Kitchener, of the Royal Engineers. He said that he spoke Arabic fluently, and asked whether he could be of any use. Tulloch at once enlisted him for his tour of reconnaissance. Disguised as Levantines, the pair bought tickets for a station called Zagazig. Slipping out of the train at an intermediate point, their real objective, they saw and sketched what they wanted and returned to Alexandria. "They took some risk," says Arthur, "for a day or two later a fair-bearded Syrian, suspected of being a British spy, was dragged out of the train at the same spot and murdered on the platform."

On his return to Cyprus, Kitchener found himself in trouble for having left the island without permission. His contention was that, having been sent out by the Foreign Office on a mission which necessarily gave him the free run of Cyprus, he needed no "leave" to go from one part of the island to another. He held that "leave of absence" could not mean anything other than permission to depart from Cyprus. He seems to have forgotten two things. The first is that he had been ill, and that "leave of absence" could be equitably interpreted as authority to rest and abstain from work. The second is that it is the chief's construction of a regulation that counts, and not that of every petty lieutenant. Besides, he should not have "accidentally" missed that boat if he wished posterity to believe that the young officer who subsequently became so great a martinet was not guilty of a technical infraction of the rules. But, whatever explanations he may have given in later life when teased for this disobedience, he waited for a few days to allow the High Commissioner's anger to cool, and then wrote :—

"I have been very much pained since my return at the view you took of my absence in Alexandria. I think it my duty to let you know how extremely anxious I am to see service in Egypt. At the same time, I feel fully the claims you have on my services with regard to the Survey. A proposal was made to me to help on the Intelligence Staff, and should a more definite appointment

be offered I cannot help feeling that my remaining here in a civil capacity while military service was offered me might be used against me in my future career. My greatest ambition up to the present is to finish the map of Cyprus, and there is nothing I should regret so much as not being able to do so after three years' work. But, at the same time, I feel sure that you will agree with me that a soldier's first duty is to serve his country in the field when an opportunity is offered him, and not to remain at his ease while others are fighting."¹

The High Commissioner's reply to this letter is not available. All that we know is that Kitchener's services were requested for Wolseley's campaign against Arabi, but that the Cyprus authorities refused to allow the young Royal Engineer to accept. By the end of 1882 the survey was nearly finished. On 22nd December, Sir Evelyn Wood, then in command of the Egyptian army, telegraphed to Kitchener inviting him to join it. The proposal was at first declined. On the receipt of a second message, two days later, urging him to accept the post of second-in-command of the cavalry, the young lieutenant, turning a deaf ear to friends who told him that he would be wasting his special talents, accepted the offer. It thus came to pass that his Christmas present from Fate that year was an assignment which was destined to open to him the portals of fame.

It was under these conditions that Kitchener again landed in Egypt and set his feet firmly on the high road to fortune. He came to the country at a time when England's position in the Valley of the Nile was precarious and the Khedivial State groaning under the load of a suffocating debt. He remained long enough to see Britain's hegemony in Egypt unassailable and the finances of the Viceroy impregably sound. In this great work his share was second only to that of Cromer. And when, after the departure of the great Baring, Liberalism in England and Nationalism in Egypt seemed to menace the stability of what had been accomplished, Kitchener's return to Cairo in 1911, as Diplomatic

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

Agent and Consul-General, consolidated the achievement of the creator of Modern Egypt.

A man of such ability, endowed with such special aptitudes, was not destined to remain the second-in-command of a cavalry which consisted of but one regiment. When Gordon left for Khartum, on his last fateful mission, the need for reorganizing the Intelligence service of the Egyptian army became manifest. To Kitchener was assigned an important part in this work. Gordon's journals show that at the outset he was not very well pleased with the young man's activities. And yet, as time wore on, Gordon appears to have foreseen that the Major, whose efforts he had at first criticized, would eventually succeed him as Governor-General of the Sudan.

The two men do not seem to have been personally acquainted with one another. Gordon's first reference to Kitchener is recorded under date of 21st September, 1884. All that it says is that "the three messengers from Dongola came in with . . . notes from Floyer and Kitchener saying forces were coming up". This letter was not addressed to Gordon, but to Colonel Stewart, the Governor-General's second-in-command. It read :—

"Debbah, 22nd August, 1884.

"Dear Stewart,

"Can I do anything for you or General Gordon ? I should be awfully glad if you will let me know. The relief expedition is evidently coming up this way, but whether they will go by Berber or attempt the direct road from here I do not know. The Mahdi is in a bad way ; he has abandoned Darfur, and has no reinforcements to send to Khartum and Senaar, which are asked for."

"Yours always,

"(signed) H. H. KITCHENER." ¹

Gordon's journal entry on 23rd September again refers to Kitchener. It is this note which brings out

¹ *The Journals of Major-General C. G. Gordon at Khartum*, Introduction and notes by A. Egmont Hake, London, Kegan Paul (1885), p. 70.

the fact that the "Green-tab" officer got on the nerves of the veteran. Gordon was then hemmed in at Khartum. His back was against the wall. His life and the lives of his garrison were menaced. The reference in the letter to Stewart about the Mahdi being "in a bad way" struck the Highlander as being a poor joke, as he knew that the Mahdi's forces were blockading Khartum and that he, Gordon, was a prisoner. The letter which aggrieved the Governor-General read :—

"Dear General Gordon,

"Mr Egerton has asked me to send you the following: '30th August. Tell Gordon steamers are being passed over second cataract and that we wish to be informed through Dongola exactly when he expects to be in difficulties as to provisions and ammunition.' Message ends. Lord Wolseley is coming out to command. The 35th Regiment is now being sent from Halfa to Dongola. Sir E. Wood is at Halfa. Generals Earle, Dormer, Buller, and Freemantle are coming up Nile with troops. I think an expedition will be sent across from here to Berber. A few words about what you wish would be very acceptable.

"Yours,

"(signed) H. H. KITCHENER, R.E.

"Debbah, 31st August."

But after all, Kitchener was merely a forwarding agent used by Mr. Egerton, Baring's first assistant at Cairo. It was the diplomatist at whom Gordon struck when he wrote :—

"I am sure I should like that fellow Egerton. There is a light-hearted jocularly about his communications, and I should think the cares of life sat easily on him. He wishes to know *exactly* 'day, hour, and minute' that he (Gordon) expects to be 'in difficulties as to provisions and ammunition'." ¹

And yet, so ingrained is it in human nature to blame a messenger of unpleasant news for the information that

¹ Ibid., p. 74.

it is his duty to convey that, on 24th September, Gordon made the following entry in his journal :—

“ Read Floyer’s telegram, with Kitchener’s note to Stewart on same paper—it perfectly exasperates one. Kitchener asks Stewart what can he do for him—nothing of what has gone on with respect to the Sudan since Graham’s expedition. Of course men are not *obliged* to write at all. . . . What is K. doing at Debbah that he could not write a better letter than to tell me the names of the generals and regiments—a matter of the most supreme indifference to Khartum.”¹

Nevertheless, so fair-minded was Gordon that, even though he felt that he had been deserted and still considered that Kitchener’s Intelligence Service was inefficient, he saw in time that it was unjust to blame that officer for Egerton’s folly. The Scotsman accordingly entered in his diary on 26th November :—

“ I like Baker’s description of Kitchener : ‘ The man whom I have always placed my hopes upon, Major Kitchener, R.E., who is one of the few *very superior* British officers with a cool and good head and hard constitution, combined with untiring energy, has now pushed up to Dongola and has proved that the *Mudir* is indispensable.’ ”²

When Gordon wrote these lines he was convinced that London had already put him on the black list. He therefore wrote :—

“ Whoever comes up here had better appoint Major Kitchener Governor-General, for it is certain, after what has passed, *I am impossible* (what a comfort).” The next day, 27th November, he added : “ If Kitchener would take the place, he would be the best man to put in as Governor-General.”³

“ Kitchener,” writes Sir George Arthur, “ yielded to no one in his veneration—amounting to something little removed from hero-worship—for Gordon, and among his most treasured relics was Gordon’s last letter to him, written two months before the final

¹ Ibid., p. 94.

³ Ibid., p. 362.

² Ibid., p. 360.

catastrophe." It was dated Khartum, 26th November, 1884, and ran in part :—

" My dear Kitchener,

" Yesterday I received your letter—16th September, Merawi—in which you send me a cipher. I wish you would write plainly and not in cipher, for it is quite unnecessary, inasmuch as, if captured, the Mahdi has the key (slip cut out of Kitchener's letter and passed on—'What do you want? H. H. Kitchener. Best regards to Stewart'). Well I think I may say, to get out of this, after nearly nine months' worry. I cannot make out about the *Abbas* and Stewart but hope for the best."

The postscript to this letter is more important than the note itself. It read :—

" I do not write any news, for I keep a daily journal, which I send to Chief of Staff. You will pardon my jokes about you and Chermside. . . . There will be no peace between me and Gladstone's Government—that is certain. Neither will I be cozened by any sweet words. Neither will I accept anything from them. . . . If you would take the post here of Governor-General, with a subsidy of £500,000 a year—for you will get no taxes in—it would be well for the people, and you would have no difficulty that you could not master D.V." ¹

Having stood the acid test of satisfying both General Gordon and the Cairo authorities, it fell to Major Kitchener's lot to write the official despatch which set forth the circumstances attendant upon the death of the gallant officer whom Mr. Winston Churchill describes as "the exacting General at Khartum".² In 1886 Kitchener was appointed Governor of Suakin. In the autumn of 1890 Baring requested him to undertake the reorganization of the Egyptian Police Force; Kitchener demurred. The assignment made no appeal to him; it was, in fact, absolutely distasteful to him. He was very frank, and said to the all-powerful British Consul-General: "I am a soldier. My heart belongs

¹ Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, 104.

² Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

to the army. My ambition is centred upon the Sirdariah. If I accept this opening, it will put me out of the running when Sir Francis Grenfell retires." To this Baring replied: "Use your own judgment. Take the matter under advisement for twenty-four hours and meditate carefully over this concrete fact. It is quite probable that I may still be here when Sir Francis Grenfell retires. You may be certain that if I am, and you refuse this billet, you will not realize your cherished ambition, if I can prevent it." The next morning Kitchener took the post.¹

In April, 1892, Sir Francis Grenfell resigned his command as Sirdar of the Egyptian army. Baring, "who had been narrowly watching Kitchener's work," writes Sir George Arthur, "was determined that a big man should eventually be matched with the big opportunity which would surely arrive, and threw all his influence into the scale for his nominee."²

This is a somewhat misleading statement. Colonel Wodehouse was in every sense worthy of the honour of commanding the Khedivial forces. He had shown high ability as a field officer, conspicuous talent as an administrator, and was greatly beloved. Colonel Kitchener had but recently rendered the British Consul-General a signal service in taking over the reorganization of the police, and had carried out that work with great tact, promptness, and thoroughness. He had, as it were, received his original nomination from General Gordon. These circumstances weighed in the balance. Subsequent events ratified the choice. There is nothing, however, to show that British pluck, British strategy, and British persistency would have failed in the Sudan had Colonel Wodehouse won Baring's support.

A few months before Kitchener was inducted into office Tewfik Pasha died, and Abbas Hilmi became Khedive of Egypt. The new Khedive was a very young man. He was still in his teens. Flatterers got hold of him and whispered to him, telling him that he was too

¹ Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, 166, gives the substantive facts just set forth.

² Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, 169.

big a man to follow in his father's footsteps. They suggested to him that he should prove his mettle by asserting his power over his own army. They pointed out to him that the ideal opportunity for defining his authority would be his first general inspection of all his troops. He fell in with the idea, and announced his intention of reviewing his forces both in Egypt and on the frontier. "Every preparation was made to do him honour, but by an accident of fortune there fell into the hands of the Sirdar's staff a copy of the Khedive's confidential programme which revealed His Highness's set purpose of making disparaging remarks on the army in *crescendo* as he proceeded upstream."¹

Everybody thought that the document was a forgery. It seemed too stupid to be true. But, as the Viceroy's tour proceeded, his conduct fitted in so perfectly with the plan outlined in the memorandum that no doubt in regard to its authenticity was possible. The facts had to be looked straight in the face. Baring—who had become Lord Cromer in June, 1892—hastened to assure the Sirdar that if he put his foot down the whole weight of Her Majesty's Government would be behind him.

For the final review at Halfa the Khedive took up his station at the saluting-base. The first Egyptian battalion, a very smart unit under a British commanding officer, marched past in perfect array. Abbas Hilmi turned to the Sirdar and found fault with both marching and equipment, declaring that the Commanding Officer should be reprimanded for it. When Kitchener said that this was one of his best battalions the Khedive cut him short, saying: "I know what marching should be. I have been brought up at the Theresianum in Vienna and I tell you that this marching is a disgrace." He then pointed to a battalion officered only by Egyptians and observed: "Look at that battalion. I call that marching."

The Khedive was consistent. For each British-led battalion he had a word of abuse; for each purely native command nothing but praise. Before the review

¹ Ibid., p. 182.

was over he made a particularly unfair remark about British discipline, whereupon the Sirdar remarked : " As Your Highness is evidently displeased with the efforts of myself and the British officers in training Your Army, nothing remains for me but to place my resignation and that of all the British officers in your hands." Abbas Hilmi was startled. He flushed, and stammered out that he had not meant to convey quite so severe a reproof. But Kitchener was adamant. He broke off the parade and rode away with his staff.

A message was sent post-haste to Cairo. Lord Cromer acted with characteristic decision. He informed the immature sovereign that unless he at once published a dictated order expressing his complete satisfaction with the discipline and training of his army as carried out by his British officers, his immediate abdication would be required. The Khedive blustered, turned to his people for support, found none, and signed on the dotted line. Thus the Sirdar's authority was definitely established, and Kitchener waited for the command to attack the Khalifa with full confidence in the army which Wood, Grenfell, and he had moulded into shape.

CHAPTER IX

READY

IF the Sirdar had to fight the Khedive in order to compel that ruler to do justice to the British officers of the Egyptian army, he had likewise to wrestle with his fellow-countryman, Sir William Garstin, for every pound of gold that was given to the troops. Lord Cromer held on to the money of the *fellah* with a tenacity which will ever do him honour. He knew that Egypt is nothing but an oasis rescued from the desert by the waters of the Nile ; and he devoted every spare piastre to the improvement of irrigation. Sir William Garstin impersonated that service just as Kitchener incarnated the military genius of the new Egypt.

Both men watched the barometer of Egyptian finance. Whenever a surplus came in sight, both hurried to the British Agency to impound it. One wanted a reservoir, the other cannon. Kitchener was usually the first to get Lord Cromer's ear. Only a few weeks before the advance on Dongola was ordered, Garstin met the Sirdar as the latter was leaving the Consulate-General. He inquired with a smile the result of the General's interview. "I'm beaten," said Kitchener abruptly ; "you've got your damned dam"—and Garstin saw visions of thousands of feddans redeemed from the sands.

But the Sirdar kept hammering away, undeterred, at perfecting his machine. He knew that his men had been taught how to fight. He determined to assist them by an Intelligence Service worthy of their best efforts. This branch of the Egyptian army rose under the direction of Sir Reginald (then Colonel) Wingate to great efficiency. "The sharp line between civilization and savagery was drawn at Wady Halfa," to quote *The River War*, "but beyond that line, up the great river, within the great wall of Omdurman, into the arsenal, into the treasury, into the mosque, into the

Khalifa's house itself, the spies and the secret agents of the Government—disguised as traders, as warriors, or as women—worked their stealthy way. Sometimes the road by the Nile was blocked, and the messengers must toil across the deserts to Darfur, and so by a treacherous journey creep into Omdurman. At others, a trader might work his way from Suakin or from the Italian settlements. But by whatever route it came, information, whispered at Halfa, catalogued at Cairo, steadily accumulated, and the diaries of the Intelligence Department grew in weight and number, until at last every important Emir was watched and located, every garrison estimated, and even the endless intrigues and brawls in Omdurman were carefully recorded.”¹

This shows that thoroughness was Kitchener's guiding star. He venerated Gordon's memory. He knew that Khartum had become the grave of that English gentleman and Christian soldier largely because London had been fundamentally ignorant of what was then going on in the Black Country. He determined that when it should please Lord Cromer to order him to attack, no surprise should await his troops. His eyes were everywhere; his ears were ubiquitous, and his nose quick to scent every change of wind. It was his Secret Service which paved the way to his victory, just as it was the work of the Intelligence Branch of the British army which, in August, 1914, put the first nail in the coffin of German overlordship when the “Old Contemptibles” were safely landed on the continent largely as a result of the incomparably brilliant counter-espionage arrangements of Sir George Anston.

Wingate and his men kept in intimate touch with world politics. They centred their attention, however, upon the relations which these international happenings had to Egypt, the Sudan, and adjacent lands. They knew that Italy was flirting with Abyssinia. They feared that the Quirinale was in danger of getting its fingers burnt. They vehemently suspected that France would not frown should African embers scorch Italian digits.

¹ Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

They read the pages of history. They had not forgotten that as early as February, 1885, King Humbert had taken over Massawah from Egypt and that this act had been greatly resented by Abyssinia. They remembered that in January, 1887, Abyssinian forces had attacked the Italians and inflicted severe losses upon them. They recalled that in April, 1888, Italian troops, numbering over 20,000 men, had come into contact with the hostile Ethiopians and that negotiations had taken the place of fighting. They saw that Italo-Abyssinian relations had their repercussion upon the Khalifa's empire. Their reports showed that when, in July, 1894, Colonel Baratieri had planted the tricolour of Savoy at Kassala, Mangasha, the Abyssinian, intrigued with the Ansars and as a result of victories at Amba Alagi (7th December, 1895) and Macalla (23rd January, 1896) forced the Italians to fall back. They read the lesson taught by Menelik's triumph at Adawa, where on 1st March, 1896, Baratieri suffered that signal defeat which overthrew the Crispi Ministry and forced Italy to sign the unfavourable treaty of Adis Ababa and to recognize the independence of Abyssinia. And, what is far more significant, they got together the proof that the arms and munitions which had been supplied to the victorious Abyssinians came, at all events in part, from French and Russian sources.¹

The defeat of the Italians meant a blow not only to Italy and to the Triple Alliance but to the white race. It encouraged the Khalifa to believe that just as the Mahdi had conquered Gordon, and Menelik had defeated Baratieri, he could wipe out Kitchener. It convinced Abdullah that the black man was invincible—and that there were white men who would give him arms to fight the English. The Egyptian Intelligence Service furnished Cairo and London with concrete evidence of the improved fighting spirit of the Khalifa's forces engendered by these Abyssinian successes. It also collected data which showed that a small quick-firing gun of continental manufacture and of a new pattern had

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 100. See also p. 312.

recently come into the possession of the Ansars.¹ It drew the inference that Paris was, perhaps, not unfriendly to the Khalifa and willing to close its eyes to the surreptitious shipment to him of French arms.

It was known to London that France had well-defined ambitions upon Central Africa. Paris looked upon that part of the Dark Continent near the head-waters of the Nile as being what lawyers call *res nullius*—property of nobody—no-man's-land. The Quai d'Orsay has worked out an elaborate theory in support of this view. It is set forth quite clearly and succinctly in de Freycinet's *La Question d'Égypte*.²

A Franco-Congolese agreement signed on 14th July, 1894, ceded to France certain claims which had previously been vested in Belgium. France appointed a Monsieur Liotard as her Governor of this zone. In the beginning of 1895 he established a post of some importance at a place called Zemio. He subsequently extended the field of his authority. In July, 1896, Colonel (then Captain) Marchand reported to Monsieur Liotard and was given a mandate to penetrate beyond the Congo Basin and to advance into that of the White Nile.³

The significance of these French movements was not lost upon Downing Street. If what Dicey says in *The Story of the Khedivate* be true, the knowledge that France had decided to plunge into Darkest Africa must have created a mild sensation. He writes :—

“The victory at Adawa had demonstrated the valour of the Abyssinian troops and had proved also that for the first time in Abyssinian history the whole military forces of the country were under the absolute control of one single ruler. Negotiations were entered into between the *Negus* and the French Republic, and there seems no reason to doubt that an arrangement was concluded by which France was to send an expedition from her possessions in the West of the Sudan to raise the French flag on the banks of the White Nile. It was arranged that

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

² *La Question d'Égypte*, by C. de Freycinet, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, p. 397.

³ *The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*, i, 271.

an Abyssinian army should meet the French expedition in the neighbourhood of Fashoda ; and the joint forces were then to establish themselves on Sudanese territory, so as to bar any claim on the part of England to the territory in question. It is not clear what part the Khalifa and the Dervishes were intended to play in this anti-English project. Communications of some sort did certainly pass between Adis Ababa and Khartum at this period, and a French flag was, I am told, found in Omdurman upon its capture by our troops."¹

When all is said and done, however, the fact stands out that Marchand did not start on his mission until some four months after Kitchener had received his marching orders. The suspicion that the French were intriguing with the Abyssinians and the surmise that the latter had some subterranean understanding with the Khalifa may have played a part in persuading London that the hour had come to strike at the Black menace. But the decision was taken with dramatic suddenness. It was Rome, not Paris, that set the spark which put the batteries in motion. Cromer² and Colvin,³ Churchill⁴ and Arthur, Atteridge⁵ and Dicey⁶ stress the important part that Italy played in this matter.

Sir Auckland Colvin, who was unquestionably in a position to know the inside facts, says that :—

"In 1896 the Government of Italy, a friendly Power, found itself temporarily in severe straits, from the pressure, on one side, of the Abyssinians, and from the presence, on the other hand, of the Dervishes before Kassala. In their emergency the Italian Cabinet appealed to London for such assistance as it would furnish, to divert the attention of the Dervishes from Kassala. The reply took the form of an order issued to Cairo to extend the Egyptian frontier to Dongola."

Hilliard Atteridge, who was the special correspondent of the London *Daily Chronicle* with the Dongola

¹ Dicey, *op. cit.*, p. 474.

² Cromer, *op. cit.*, ii, 83.

³ Colvin, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

⁴ Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

⁵ *Towards Khartum*, by A. Hilliard Atteridge, London, Innes (1897), p. 50.

⁶ Dicey, *op. cit.*, p. 474.

expeditionary force, centres his story round the Italians, saying that their Ministry "explained to the Italian Parliament that they had held on to their exposed position in order to co-operate with the British by keeping the Dervishes occupied in that direction". He scoffs at such a theory. Lord Cromer shares his view. The latter, however, brings a new element into the picture. It is touched upon but not emphasized by Churchill. It is that the year 1895 brought in a Conservative and Unionist Administration supported by a majority so strong that there seemed little reason to expect a transference of power for five or six years.

During the period of Liberal ascendancy, and even during the years when the Salisbury Government was in office but not impregnably entrenched, a steady breeze of caution blew among the political oaks of London. The oracle pronounced in favour of a reservoir as against a Dongola expedition. But a sharp squall was about to come up from an opposite direction, with the result that in the twinkling of an eye the decision was reversed, and the oracle pronounced as decisively in favour of an advance into the Sudan as it had previously, under different barometrical indications, rejected any such idea.

These metaphors have been borrowed from *Modern Egypt*. They lead up to Lord Cromer's decisive statement that—

"the change was in some degree the outcome of the rapid growth of the Imperialistic spirit, which, about this time, took place in England, but the more immediate cause was the turn which affairs took at Massawah. The Italians were being hard pressed by the Abyssinians. Rumours were afloat that the latter were in league with the Dervishes, who were about to attack Kassala. Early in January, 1896, some discussion, which was not productive of any practical result, took place as to whether a demonstration, which might possibly relieve the pressure on the Italian forces, could not advantageously be made either from Wady Halfa or Suakin. Eventually, on 1st March, the Italian army,

under General Baratieri, was totally defeated by King Menelik's forces in the neighbourhood of Adua (Adawa). This brought matters to a crisis. The Italian Ambassador in London urged that a diversion should be made in Italian interests. On 12th March, therefore, it was suddenly decided to reoccupy Dongola."

No statement could be more categorical than these words of the uncrowned King of Egypt. He certainly knew what went on behind the scenes. But he published his book in 1908. France and England were then making sweet eyes at one another. Did this fact induce Lord Cromer to abstain from adding to the two causes cited by him, viz. "the rapid growth of the Imperialistic spirit" and the entreaty of the Italian Ambassador, a reference to a determination to thwart French designs? We cannot tell.

There is one point, however, that *Modern Egypt* does make perfectly clear. It is that the decision to attack "was taken and publicly announced with somewhat excessive haste".¹ Sir George Arthur infers that the ruling was made without consulting Lord Cromer. Here are his exact words :—

"Seldom has so important a decision been taken in such haste. To the authorities in Egypt it came as a bolt out of the blue when on 13th March a Reuter's telegram in *The Times*, dated from Cairo, but given to that journal from Downing Street, announced that the Government had decided to expedite a force to the reconquest of the Dongola province."²

Not only did the Cairo correspondent of *The Times* not send this message, but his editor did not tell him that it was being issued over what was equivalent to his signature. We read in the work of his fellow-journalist, Hilliard Atteridge, that "no one was more surprised than the gentleman who represents *The Times* in Cairo".³ The news was kept from the Khedive, although the

¹ Cromer, *op. cit.*, ii. 83.

² Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, 187.

³ Atteridge, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

advance was made by his army and in his name. But, if we agree with Dicey, there was a reason for this apparent discourtesy. It was, so he writes, because "the entourage of His Highness, at this period, included various persons in constant and intimate communication with the French Government. In an Oriental palace it is impossible to keep State news a secret, and if the impending campaign for the recovery of the Sudan had become known at the Khedivial Court it would have been known also at the Quai d'Orsay".¹

We do not know whether Lord Cromer received an official telegram telling him of the Cabinet's decision before the British public read the spurious Cairo telegram as it sipped its morning tea on 13th March. It is inferred that this deference was shown him, for the authorized *Life* of Lord Kitchener tells that—

"the official telegram reached Kitchener at 3 o'clock that same morning and drew him from his bed to seek Lord Cromer. Together they proceeded to take the necessary steps for the mobilization of the Army, and the necessary financial measures attendant. They worked at high pressure for several hours, issuing orders in all directions, when the British Agent and Consul-General suddenly remembered that he had not observed the formality of informing the Khedive." He did not disturb the repose of the Viceroy, and, knowing that Abbas Hilmi was not an early riser, waited until a normal hour before apprising him of what had already been done in his name.

The decision of the British Government not only came as a complete surprise, but was taken at a season of the year most unfavourable for military operations. The hot weather was approaching. The Nile was low. Lord Cromer's report, which had been published in the early days of March, had led everybody to infer that no attack was contemplated. The frontier was tranquil. With the exception of a small raid on a village in the Wady Halfa district and an insignificant incursion in the Tokar Delta, the Khalifa's forces had, during

¹ Dicey, *op. cit.*, p. 480.

the year, maintained "a strictly defensive attitude". The fact that London thus threw a bomb into Cairo and yet found neither Cromer's finances nor Kitchener's army unprepared for immediate action is the highest tribute that can possibly be paid to these two Englishmen.

CHAPTER X

FINANCING THE CAMPAIGN

WHEN once it had been decided to advance, one of the questions which naturally arose was how funds for the expenses of the expedition were to be provided. London considered that the reconquest of the Sudan was an Egyptian interest, and that the Khedivial treasury might justly be called upon to bear the expenses. The possibility of any charge devolving on the British Exchequer had not been adequately considered. It was held not only that the Cairo Government ought to pay but that they would be able to do so. The fact that the key of the Egyptian treasure-house was in international keeping had been insufficiently appreciated, if it had not been entirely forgotten. It was impossible to obtain access to the accumulations of past years without the consent of the Commissioners of the Debt.¹

While no quotation marks have been employed in the preceding paragraph, the wording has been taken bodily from *Modern Egypt*. This has been done in order to eliminate the possibility of misinterpreting Lord Cromer's words. He hated everything that savoured of internationalism. The Mixed Tribunals were his pet aversion, the "Domains" his special antipathy, and the *Caisse de la Dette* was to him something akin to a red rag to a bull. The "Domains" play no part in this book. The Mixed Tribunals and the *Caisse de la Dette* dominate this chapter. It may therefore be well to introduce them to the reader. Egypt is the land of paradox. The latter institution is the more recent creation of the two international bodies which got on the nerves of the great Baring. It will therefore be dealt with first.

"The *Caisse de la Dette*, or as it is called in Egypt

¹ Cromer, op. cit., ii, 86.

simply the Caisse," wrote Viscount Milner in *England in Egypt*, "is an institution which, from comparatively small beginnings, has grown to be an important and ubiquitous factor in the government of the country. It is one more *imperium in imperio*, another wheel—it would be hard to say the how-manieth—to the coach of Egyptian administration. The *Caisse* was first constituted by the decree of 2nd May, 1876, and consisted at the outset of only three members, a Frenchman, an Austrian, and an Italian. An Englishman was added in 1877, and in 1885 Germany and Russia demanded, and obtained, the right to be represented."¹ These six delegates made up the *Caisse* until the Great War weeded out the Austrian and the German. The Russian disappeared somewhat later. France, Italy, and England still hold on to these posts. They are to-day probably the most luscious plums known to the horticulture of political sinecures.

In the beginning, the Commissioners were little more than receivers of certain revenues, which had been specially assigned to the service of the Debt. They were representatives not so much of the Powers as of the creditors. The British Government felt so strongly on this score that London for quite a number of months refused to propose an English Commissioner. As time wore on these delegates came to be regarded not only as receivers of revenue in the name of the creditors of Egypt, but as guardians acting on behalf of the Powers, to watch over the execution of the complicated agreements which regulate the finances of Egypt. In that capacity they even possess certain legislative powers.²

"Does the Egyptian Government wish to adopt any general measure for the relief of taxation? It must have the approval of the *Caisse*," we read in *England in Egypt*, "for such a reduction will of course affect the receipts of the provinces specially assigned to the bondholders, and those revenues cannot be reduced without the consent of the Commissioners. Does it wish to raise a fresh loan, even for the most legitimate purposes—such

¹ Milner, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

² *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

as the commutation of pensions, or the construction of irrigation works, which will augment the revenue? Here again it must have the *Caisse* with it, before it can as much as begin to collect the whole series of other necessary consents—that of Turkey, and that of the six Great Powers. And when the loan is approved, and the money raised, it is once more the *Caisse* which will be charged with the disbursement of it, and with the duty of seeing that it is applied to the specified objects.”¹

“But,” continues Lord Milner, “the powers of interference possessed by the *Caisse* cannot be fully understood without a glance at the extremely peculiar financial system embodied in the Law of Liquidation. The Powers, as we have seen, stepped in to save Egypt from bankruptcy, but in return they put her into a strait-waistcoat of the severest kind. The revenues of the State were divided into two nearly equal parts, of which one was to go to the *Caisse* for the benefit of the bondholders, and the other to the Government to defray the expenses of administration. There were thus practically two Budgets, but the principles applied to them were very different. If the Budget of the *Caisse* showed a deficit, the Government was bound to make good that deficit, whereas if the *Caisse* had a surplus, however large, the Government had no right to share it. On the other hand, if the Government had a deficit, the *Caisse* could not be called upon to make up the deficiency, while, if the Government had a surplus, the *Caisse* had certain contingent claims thereon.”²

The purpose of all this formalism was to guard against an act of bankruptcy. Desperate remedies were taken to meet a desperate case. When, in the course of time, British control brought the Egyptian Treasury into a state of assured solvency, such preventive measures became more than irksome. Sir Edgar Vincent met the situation thus created. He proposed a plan by which the surplus at the end of each year was to be allowed to accumulate in a Reserve Fund. Extinction of debt was not to begin until this nest-egg amounted to

¹ Ibid., p. 54.

² Ibid., p. 55.

£E. 2,000,000. It was hoped that the Treasury would thus have a large sum of money to guard against any unforeseen contingencies which might arise.

The idea was excellent. It met with the assent of the Powers. It was embodied in a Decree dated 12th July, 1888. Article III of this law describes how the money might be spent. It was to be applied to "extraordinary expenditure undertaken with the previous assent of the Commission of the Debt". "This was," writes Lord Cromer, "a provision of great importance, for as the Reserve Fund increased, it was possible to turn the money over, and, by making advances to the Government, to allow various works of public utility to be constructed. As, however, it rested with the Commission to decide whether any advance should be made, it is obvious that under the decree of 1888 the powers vested in the Commissioners were notably increased."¹

Shortly after the Dongola expedition had been definitely decided upon, application was made to the *Caisse* for a grant of £E. 500,000 from the General Reserve Fund, in order to cover the expenses of the campaign. By a majority of four to two, the Commissioners granted the request. The French and Russian delegates, who constituted the dissentient minority, instantly commenced an action in the Mixed Tribunals at Cairo.

These courts are an emanation of the Capitulations. Americans would be tempted to designate them as the Federal judicial system of Egypt. But that description is somewhat too facile. To understand their mechanism is to fathom the mystery of the East. Suffice it to state that they impersonate the Internationalism that Lord Cromer hated, and that the Egyptian Government itself may be cited by a foreigner to appear before their bar.

The judges of these Courts were recruited from among the Capitulatory Powers, viz. England, France, Spain, Portugal, Norway and Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy,

¹ Cromer, *op. cit.*, ii, 308.

Greece, Russia, and the United States of America. There were also representatives of Egypt. No abler group of men has ever sat on any bench in any country in the world than the fifty odd jurists who, in the nineties of the last century, made up the several benches of the Mixed Courts of First Instance and of Appeal. They were as high-minded as they were efficient, as impartial as they were competent, and as assiduous as they were erudite. This is insisted upon because we read in *Modern Egypt* that—

“The judges of the Court of Appeal—or at all events the majority of them—could not altogether shake themselves free from the political electricity with which the atmosphere of Egypt was, at that time, so heavily charged.”¹

This language is incriminatory. To say that judges “could not altogether shake themselves free from the political electricity with which the atmosphere of Egypt was, at that time, so heavily charged” is to accuse them of being mentally or morally unfit to discharge their high duties. The indictment drawn by the great diplomatist, who hated the Mixed Courts with an ire that was as all-consuming as it was relentless and as bitter as it was blind, is no less sweeping than that drafted by the youthful impetuosity of one of the greatest living masters of English prose, Mr. Winston Churchill. His *The River War* contains this choice morsel :—

“The Commissioners of France and Russia, who had been outvoted, brought an action against their colleagues on the ground that the grant was *ultra vires*; and against the Egyptian Government for the return of the money thus wrongly obtained. . . . The case was tried before the Mixed Tribunals, an institution which exists in Egypt superior to and independent of the sovereign rights of that country. . . . On the part of the Egyptian Government and the four Commissioners it was contended that the Mixed Tribunals had no competency to try the case. . . . The argument was a strong one; but had it been ten times as strong, the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

result would have been the same. The Mixed Tribunals, an international institution, delivered its judgment on strictly political grounds, the judges taking their orders from the different countries they represented. It was solemnly pronounced that war expenses were not 'extraordinary expenses'. The proximate destruction of the Khalifa's power was treated quite as a matter of everyday occurrence. A state of war was apparently regarded as usual in Egypt."¹

The brilliant word-painter who thus accused judges of "taking their orders from the different governments they represented," made this libellous charge in a volume which bears this dedication: "This book is inscribed to the Marquess of Salisbury, K.G., under whose wise direction the Conservative Party have long enjoyed power and the nation prosperity; during whose administration the reorganization of Egypt has been mainly accomplished, and upon whose advice Her Majesty determined to order the reconquest of the Sudan." This fulsome praise was written on 26th September, 1899. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* informs us, nevertheless, that "his (Mr. Winston Churchill's) views, however, as to the Conservative Party gradually changed, and having during 1904-5 taken an active part in assisting the Liberal Party in Parliament, he stood for North-West Manchester at the general election of 1906 and was triumphantly returned as a Liberal and free-trader". In September, 1924, the author of *The River War* again became a Conservative. More recent information shows that he is now an ultra-Conservative.

This metamorphosis justifies one in assuming that the versatile soldier who became a war correspondent, a lecturer, a politician, an author and a painter, and whose ability has made him an outstanding success in every line of endeavour that has appealed to his changing fancy, is now an intransigent champion of the judicial integrity of the Mixed Courts of Egypt. One feels confident that sooner or later he will ably defend them in a volume dedicated to Proteus. But until this

¹ Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

work appears, Lord Cromer's unmerited aspersions call for a reply in these pages. His attack forms a regrettable incident in the "Winning of the Sudan".

The final judgment which has been so bitterly assailed was given on 2nd December, 1896. It bears the signature of the French Chief Justice who presided at the hearing of the case. No dissenting opinion was delivered, as the law applied by the Mixed Courts looks upon the Anglo-American practice which permits a minority to give public expression to its views as nothing more or less than judicial anarchy. There is no way of knowing how the various judges voted in their consulting-room. They are not allowed to divulge the secrets of their deliberations. Should they do so opprobrium would be their lot and impeachment might be their fate.

Eight judges heard the case. The decision may have been unanimous. While Mr. Winston Churchill would fain have his readers believe that he knows the opinion of each and every one of these jurists, he is dealing in surmise. It is possible that the French Chief Justice, who was the organ of the Court, fought the decision to the last ditch and that the judges of the Powers who supported Lord Cromer overrode the Gaul. We do not know.

The opinion of the Court is not lengthy. Men trained in the Latin School of Law do not, as a rule, write long judgments. They depend upon preciseness rather than redundancy, upon reasoning rather than precedents. This decision is true to these principles. It shows that the wide authority given to the Mixed Tribunals makes them competent to hear the cause and, grappling with the main argument levelled against them by *The River War*, the *Conseiller Rapporteur* carefully dissects the Khedivial decrees which bear upon the powers of the *Caisse*.

The Court brings out the fact that the latest of these firmans, that of 10th July, 1888, constitutes, as do the previous ones, a veritable contract between the Capitulatory Nations and the Egyptian Government.

And, having laid down this predicate, the opinion applies to the decree the general rule of interpretation germane to such cases.

Running through the analysis of the Court there appears to be an honest attempt to ascertain the true intention of the parties to the 10th July, 1888, contract. The Powers held the whip-hand in 1888. They were not interested in the reconquest of the Sudan. They wanted money for their bondholders. They were anxious to insure the regular payment of the Egyptian coupons. They were willing to allow the cash which was ear-marked for them to be diverted into works of a permanent character destined to give greater security to their loans, but they were not prepared to sanction the use of their gold for war.

The judgment stresses the point that the correspondence which passed between Egypt and the Powers makes no reference to any military expenditure. It emphasizes the argument that it was the duty of Cairo to call the attention of Europe to such purposes, if the law of 1888 was supposed to apply to them. In a word, the gist of the decision is a carefully reasoned thesis in support of a point of view to which an honourable and fearless judge could most readily assent. Once the premises laid down by this reasoning are accepted, it is obvious that the majority of the Commissioners went beyond their mandate in permitting the Egyptian Government to use the Reserve Fund to reconquer the Sudan.

The decree which flowed logically from this chain of reasoning ordered the Egyptian Government to refund to the *Caisse* the sum of £E. 500,000 illegally drawn from the Reserve Fund.¹ The official publication of this decision does not give the names of the eight justices who handed down this *arrêt*. Reference to the original record shows that the Court was made up of the following *Conseillers*: Maurice Jean Joseph Bellet (France), Président, Nicolas D'Abaza (Russia), Hammad Bey (Egypt), Emmanuel Antoniadis (Greece),

¹ *Bulletin de législation et de jurisprudence Égyptienne*, ix^e Année, p. 21 et seq.

Wacyf Azmy Pasha (Egypt), Charles Gescher (Germany), Garabed Reizian Bey (Egypt), and Giuseppe Moriondo (Italy). It will have been noted that neither an Englishman nor an American sat on this bench. The Mixed Court of Appeal, in those days, was divided into two chambers each composed of eight members, five foreigners and three Egyptians. Each section had its allotted category of cases. The Dongola Expedition suit fell to the division to which neither an Englishman nor an American had been assigned. There was nothing suspicious about their exclusion from this hearing.

While we do not know the opinion of each of the eight *Conseillers* who decided this cause, analysis demonstrates that at least five justices, or at all events three foreigners, concurred in the judgment. This latter hypothesis is put forward because, eight being an even number, the Organic Law of the Mixed Courts contains a provision to the effect that in case the Court be equally divided *c'est l'opinion à laquelle concourt le plus grand nombre d'étrangers qui prévaut*.

These boring details are gone into because Mr. Winston Churchill has said—it may be well to repeat his words—that: “the Mixed Tribunals, an international institution, delivered its judgment on strictly political grounds, the judges taking their orders from the different countries they represented.” This means that the author of *The River War* affirms that Paris told Mr. Chief Justice Bellet how to decide this case and that Saint Petersburg gave its instructions to Mr. Justice D'Abaza, Athens to Mr. Justice Antoniadis, Berlin to Mr. Justice Gescher, and Rome to Mr. Justice Moriondo.

Such an accusation is libellous. No libel could possibly be more obvious. It strikes at the foundation of society. It attacks the Chancelleries of Europe as well as the integrity of the judicial ermine. It is a charge which an English jury would castigate in a manner which men would not forget overnight. But Paris, Saint Petersburg, Athens, Berlin, and Rome are far from London. More than salt water separates them from

Westminster. It is well, therefore, to recall that Egyptian judges sat on that bench. It would be interesting to know through whom Mr. Winston Churchill implies that orders were given to them.

His regrettable words appear on page 103 of *The River War*. On page 100 of the same volume he refers to the Cairo British Consulate-General as "Government House". The man who in 1896 presided at that citadel of authority was Sir Evelyn Baring, as high-minded an English gentleman as ever lived. Thus the one man in all the world who could have given orders to the Egyptian judges in 1896 was a statesman whose record of achievement refutes the very suggestion of any such nefarious practice as that imputed to him by the pen of a young press correspondent who is now a prominent member of the British Parliament.

The absurdity of the charge thus levelled against the Mixed Court judiciary and Lord Cromer's memory is shown by a glance at the nationality of the judges who handed down the decision. If orders had been given—and they were not—the result would have been Berlin, Rome, and Cairo, or five votes, lining up against Paris and St. Petersburg, two votes, with Athens doubtful. The five would have carried the decision against the three. This shows that the judges of the Mixed Courts were not rubber-stamp men, but honourable jurists who did their duty as they saw it and who did not take orders. The logic of their opinion may or may not be irrefutable. It has, however, the ring of sincerity.

When Mr. Winston Churchill published his *The River War* he was but twenty-five years of age. It was immaturity of judgment which caused him to risk a suit for libel by making a statement prompted by passion, and likewise at variance with objective truth. Lord Cromer's words were almost as defamatory as were those of the man whose work at the Admiralty marks him as a great administrator. But youthful inexperience cannot be pleaded on behalf of the statesman who redeemed Egypt from ruin. His language was put into black and white twelve years after the Court had ruled

against him and when his place in history had already been definitely fixed.

Lord Cromer's ire was born of the fact that, with all his ability, all his greatness, and all his statesmanship, he was a "rule or ruin" man. He could not brook contradiction. He could not tolerate disagreement. He could not see the other man's point of view. Right nine hundred and ninety-nine times out of a thousand, never refusing to listen to advice before announcing a decision, and always a gentleman, once his stand had been taken he refused to admit that another opinion could be held by anybody else. He seemed to be unable to understand that the Mixed Courts had nothing to do with his mission. They were removed from politics. They had their allotted task just as he had his. He appeared to be temperamentally incapable of grasping that fact. He became so obsessed with hatred of them that his regrettable Dongola decision outburst may be described as symptomatic rather than as exceptional.

But if unreasoning prejudice caused the irate diplomatist to say things about the Mixed Courts which were not warranted by the facts, he kept his feet on the ground even if he did lose his head. Accordingly we read in *Modern Egypt* that :—

"I had anticipated the judgment of the Court, and was therefore prepared to act. Immediately after its delivery I was authorized to promise the Egyptian Government pecuniary help from England. At that time the Egyptian treasury happened to be full. It was desirable to act promptly and thus bar the way to international complications. On 6th December, four days after the delivery of the judgment, the total sum due, amounting to £E.515,000, was—somewhat to the dismay of official circles in London—paid to the Commissioners of the Debt."

The promptness with which England had acted nonplussed the French and bewildered Cairo. Paris gesticulated, and was still sawing the air when Lord Cromer saw to it that the Egyptian Treasury drew a draft for the entire amount of the judgment in favour

of the *Caisse* without waiting for a remittance from London. And the Khedivial authorities recovered sufficiently from their astonishment for their Foreign Minister, Boutros Ghali Pasha, to write an official letter to the British Consul-General expressing in warm terms their gratitude for the financial help offered by Queen Victoria's Ministers. "I am desired," ran the note, "to beg your Lordship to be good enough to convey to his Lordship the Marquess of Salisbury the expression of the lively gratitude of the Khedive and the Egyptian Government for the great kindness which Her Majesty's Government has shown to them on this occasion."¹

This letter was written in the best of French. It was reproduced in the Press. But Cairo newspapers have no circulation. Illiteracy is rampant in Egypt. Comparatively few eyes were destined to read these expressions of epistolary gratitude. Lord Cromer had too keen a sense of theatricals to lose the opportunity of staging an ocular demonstration of his power. So he held up the street traffic in the Egyptian capital while, on 6th December, carts carried the £E.515,000 in gold from the Egyptian Treasury to the *Caisse*. The effect was tremendous. It was addressed to the imagination of the people. It showed that while the Mixed Courts were great, Lord Cromer, in his way, was equally great. The decision had gone against him. He capitalized his defeat and arranged a stage play which appealed to the popular fancy.

While Lord Salisbury had sent a most guarded reply to Lord Cromer's request that he, Cromer, be authorized to say that England would advance the cash called for by the decision of the Mixed Tribunals, London subsequently, with the assent of Parliament, lent the Egyptian Government £800,000 sterling at 2½ per cent interest.² In moving a vote for this accommodation Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, Chancellor of the Exchequer, said—

"since the Dongola expedition was undertaken, the

¹ Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

² Cromer, *op. cit.*, ii, 91.

British Government had never concealed either from Parliament or the country that, in their view, there should be a further advance in the same direction ; that Egypt could never be permanently secured so long as a hostile Power was in occupation of the Nile Valley up to Khartum ; and that England, having compelled the Egyptian Government to abandon the Sudan, had incurred towards its inhabitants responsibilities for the fulfilment of which the moment had arrived, now that the hateful rule of the Khalifa was crumbling to decay.”¹

The total amount advanced under the authority of this vote was £798,802 sterling. The British Cabinet ultimately wiped out its entire claim to this sum, “ thus turning the position of the French and Russian members of the *Caisse*,” writes Sir Auckland Colvin, one of Lord Cromer’s right-hand men in the regeneration of Egypt, “ and giving evidence of its intention to share with the Government of the Khedive in the costs, and possibly in the gains of the venture in which they had embarked together.”²

¹ Dickey, *op. cit.*, p. 488.

² Colvin, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

CHAPTER XI

THE ADVANCE

No frugal housekeeper takes better care of her pennies than Lord Cromer did of the piastres of the Egyptian *fellah*. He was a good steward and knew that "a stitch in time saves nine". He was the very personification of thoroughness ; he left nothing to chance. He worked hard, and insisted that those who surrounded him should pull their oar. He would not tolerate a laggard. He was a strict disciplinarian. Radically different from Kitchener in one essential particular, he had so many qualities in common with that officer that in appointing his former Commandant of Police to the Sirdarship, the Consul-General chose a man whom he considered his *alter ego*.

Modern Egypt says of the General who at three o'clock on that March morning in 1896 set to work to drive his army against the Khalifa :—

"Young, energetic, ardently and exclusively devoted to his profession, and, as the honourable scars on his face testified, experienced in Sudanese warfare, Sir Herbert Kitchener possessed all the qualities necessary to bring the campaign to a successful issue. Like many another military commander, the bonds which united him and his subordinates were those of stern discipline on the one side, and, on the other, the respect due to the superior talent and the confidence felt in the resourcefulness of a strong and masterful spirit, rather than the affectionate obedience yielded to the behests of a genial chief. . . . Sir Herbert Kitchener's main merit was that he left nothing to chance. . . . He also possessed another quality which is rare among soldiers, and which was of special value under the circumstances existing. He did not think that extravagance was the necessary handmaid of efficiency. On the contrary he was a rigid economist,

and, whilst making adequate provision for all essential and necessary expenditure, suppressed with a firm hand any tendency towards waste and extravagance.”¹

If we were to delete the reference to special experience in Sudanese warfare—and to the scar—this word-picture applies as well to Cromer himself as it does to Kitchener. If the two men had been contemporaries, this lack of contrast between them might possibly have made them antipathetic to one another. But thirteen years' difference in age served to keep them far enough apart to eliminate that intimacy which is so often the forerunner of discord. The campaign launched against the Dervish Empire was thus inaugurated under particularly favourable auspices. London may have taken the bit in its teeth when the Italian Ambassador made his appeal to the Foreign Secretary, but thenceforth Cromer dominated the situation and Kitchener was Baring in uniform.

Nothing short of perfect understanding and unquestioning loyalty made workable the peculiar relations existing between Cromer and Kitchener. The War Office spoke only when addressed and accepted no responsibility. The Khedive was a cipher. From the beginning to the end the Sirdar was under the orders of the British Consul-General. To Kitchener fell the executive functions, but in Cromer was vested absolute control. Every movement or time-table which the soldier might suggest could be vetoed by the diplomatist. And Cromer had been in uniform long enough to make it possible that he might imagine that he was a strategist. The situation was pregnant with all kinds of possibilities. Everything worked out admirably because Kitchener was Cromer's man and because the latter was big enough to give the former his implicit confidence.

This is the way in which Sir George Arthur sums up the situation :—

“Cromer knew his subordinate *au fond*. He knew also that the River War would be mainly a matter of transport and supply, and he set himself to facilitate

¹ Cromer, *op. cit.* ii, 87.

these and to watch the progress of the campaign. 'I abstained,' he wrote, 'from mischievous activity, and I acted as a check on the interference of others.' Elasticity was the essence of the scheme, and Cromer willingly allowed Kitchener, when necessary, to communicate directly with agents in England, with the War Office, and even with the Admiralty—reserving to himself the final word for every transaction and important move. He left to the Commander in the field the same free hand which he himself obtained from the Cabinet. . . . If Kitchener's genius for organization overcame every obstacle in the path to victory, Cromer's whole-hearted and unswerving support nerved him for every effort."¹

Neither Kitchener nor Cromer had any voice in defining the initial strategy of the expedition. The redemption of the Sudan was its objective. Khartum is the heart of the Black Country, lying as it does near the confluence of the White and Blue Niles. That city marks the altar where those two streams marry and produce the Nile which passes Berber, Asswan and Cairo and flows into the Mediterranean. A glance at the map of the Sudan shows that there was more than one way of attacking the problem of getting to Khartum. But the Italian Ambassador had appealed to London for help. The Foreign Office had determined to accede to his request. This meant that the occupation of the Dongola province was necessarily the first step in the campaign waged upon the stronghold of barbarism.

The Egyptian Cabinet was convened on 13th March, 1896, to give its assent to this expedition. The reserves were called out on the 14th. On the 15th the Khedive reviewed the Cairo garrison. At the termination of the parade he was informed that his battalions would start for the front that night. It was a Sunday. Before Monday dawned Colonel Hunter, who commanded on the frontier, formed a column of all arms to seize and hold Akasha, a village on the Nile some 75 miles south of Halfa. This objective had for many years formed the main advanced post of the Dervishes.

¹ Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, 190.

The route lay through a wide and rocky country. The troops straggled into a long procession. Several times, for more than an hour, they had to move in single file over passes and through narrow defiles strewn with innumerable boulders. The right of their line of march was protected by the Nile and, although it was occasionally necessary to leave the bank, the column camped each night by the river. It was expected that the Arabs would resist the march. The cavalry and the camel corps searched the country to the south and east. Creeping along the bank, and prepared, at a moment's notice, to stand at bay at the water's edge, the small force proceeded on its way. Akasha was reached, without incident, on the 20th.¹

A week later Akasha was formed into an entrenched camp as the base for further movements. All available troops were brought forward as rapidly as train and boat could move them. Fighting the Ansars was primarily a matter of transport. Kitchener was a Royal Engineer. He determined to conquer the Khalifa by his railways and his steamers; to use English coal rather than English blood and Egyptian *nuggars* rather than Egyptian *kanonfudder*. Eight hundred and twenty-five miles separate Cairo from Akasha. His task was not an easy one, but—with Cromer's help—he was equal to it.

He had a broad-gauge railway which ran from Cairo to Balliana, a point some 220 miles, as the crow flies, south of the Egyptian capital. From Balliana to Asswan—approximately 150 miles—he was able to forward reinforcements and supplies by steamers, by barges towed by small tugs, and by a number of native sailing craft. The first cataract blocked the Nile at Asswan. A short railway line, seven miles in length and running from there to Shellal, enabled him to reach a second flotilla of water craft plying between the latter place and Wady Halfa.

¹ Churchill, op. cit., p. 108. There exists, as Sir George Arthur points out in his *Life of Kitchener*, no official history of the Omdurman campaign. Mr. Churchill's admirable *The River War* stands as a valuable record and it will be largely relied upon for most statements of fact in the next chapters.

Service along this entire distance had been maintained without interruption, as Wady Halfa had remained in Egyptian hands. Lord Wolseley's Nile Expedition had built a railway south of the frontier post, which had extended as far as Akasha. When Kitchener began his drive, this line existed only as far as Sarras, that is to say, a distance of some 30 miles. This stretch, it need not be said, was in miserable shape, but the vestige of a railway still remained. South of Sarras the Dervishes had pulled up the rails and, leaving them on or near the road bed, had used the sleepers for firewood and carried off the smaller and more portable ironwork, such as fish-plates, bolts, nuts, and spikes.¹

Kitchener dug out the old rails which had been lying in sand and sun since 1885. They were picked up, straightened out, and at first relaid by gangs of inefficient Sudanese and Egyptians led by inexperienced foremen. But the organizing genius of the Sirdar was equal to the emergency. Instruction classes were started. The men were anxious to learn. Their zeal was capitalized. In a short time they became skilled labourers, and little by little the line was lengthened. Some new rails, sleepers, and fish-plates eventually arrived. But to the last rails were dragged out of mud huts, where they had for many years done duty as rafters. An old gallows was dismounted, and railway fastenings used as kitchen-grates were collected.² But it took time to accumulate this rubbish and to get material from England. While the Royal Engineers were wrestling with this problem, camels served as the army's means of transport south of Sarras. By 1st April, less than three weeks from the beginning of the advance, the whole line of communications had been organized and was working efficiently.

While all this was going on south of Wady Halfa, Osman Digna, the Arab fox, was not idle. He saw that the 9th Sudanese had been replaced at Suakin by reservists, and that the 10th Sudanese had been transferred to Tokar. He waited until the 9th Sudanese

¹ Atteridge, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

² Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, 193.

had been conveyed to Kosseir and had marched across the desert of Kena—a distance of 120 miles—before displaying any activity. When he thus thought the moment opportune he left the army threatening the Italians at Kassala and hurried to his old stamping-ground in the Tokar Delta with 300 cavalry, 70 camelry, and 2,500 foot. As soon as the Egyptian Intelligence Service knew that the redoubtable Osman Digna was heading towards the Red Sea, instructions were given the 10th Sudanese to remain in garrison at Tokar.

Colonel Lloyd, the Governor of Suakin, was then in very bad health. His garrison was not strong either in quality or quantity. He could not afford to take any chances. He accordingly decided to march out from Suakin and effect a junction with the Tokar column at a point known as Khor Wintri. It was hoped that Osman Digna would descend and fight in the open.¹ But he did not do so. There was skirmishing but no pitched battle. The Ansar leader was checked in the sense that the Suakin and Tokar units were able to join forces and make it obvious that the Government troops were superior to those of their enemy. But negative success of this character still left Osman Digna at large and started all kinds of rumours of Egyptian defeat.²

Conditions in the Valley of the Nile called for the concentration there of all available troops. Suakin was badly in need of an adequate garrison, and yet the forces stationed at that point were required south of Wady Halfa. The War Office met the situation by deciding to send Indians to the Red Sea port so that the 10th Sudanese and the Egyptian battalions could be made available for the Dongola Expedition.

On 30th May, 1896, that sleepy hollow known as Suakin bestirred itself from its lethargy long enough to witness the arrival of the first detachments of the Indians. The 16th Bengal Infantry, the 35th Sikhs, the 1st Bombay Lancers, the 5th Bombay Mountain Battery, and one section of the Queen's Own Sappers and Miners,

¹ Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

² Atteridge, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

numbering all told about 4,000 men, had been told off for service in the Eastern Sudan. Within a few weeks they had all arrived at their new post. They formed a gallant brigade, full of martial ardour and enthusiasm. Even a layman could feel that they were efficient. In less than seven months the climate of the Sudan played havoc with them. Disease decimated them ; disappointment gnawed at their vitals.

These Indians were fighting-men, not Adonises who capture the hearts of nursery maids. They had come to the Sudan longing for active service. After a week, when all the stores had been landed, officers and men wanted to know when they would be let loose against the enemy. Their eyes told them that no transports were available. They were informed, however, that 5,000 camels were on their way from the Somali coast to move them to Kassala or Berber. They had never heard of either place before reaching Suakin, but the reply was music to their ears. It ceased to be so when the days passed and no camels appeared. When their commanding officer, General Egerton, saw that disappointment was staring his men in the face, he proposed to take over all the advance posts up to the Kokreh range, if he were supplied with 1,000 camels for transport. He received the reply that it was not intended to use the Indian contingent as a mobile force.¹

While the Indian troops were anxiously awaiting the orders that never came, the thermometer at Suakin began to climb. These men—or, at all events, many of them—were accustomed to heat. But hot weather at home is never as trying as hot weather abroad, just as cold days among familiar scenes are not as penetrating as similar ones in foreign parts—or rain as wet. When these troopers saw the glass hover round 103° F. at night and often climb up to 115° F. by day, they suffered. Dust-storms were frequent and suffocated them. The flies made their lives impossible. These three factors, coupled with enforced inactivity, shot their nerves to pieces. The unhealthy climate, the

¹ Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

shortness of fresh meat, and the use of condensed water for drinking purposes provoked an outbreak of scurvy. At one time nearly 50 per cent of the troops were affected.

The cavalry horses and transport animals suffered as much as, if not more than, the men. Bursati attacked the beasts. The Europeans did not entirely escape. Prickly heat allowed them no rest night or day. Malaria exacted its toll. Twenty-five per cent of the British officers had to be invalided to England or to India. Only six escaped a stay in hospital. All these figures apply to Suakin. The men and animals at Tokar had a worse fate. But finally relief came. It did not take the form the men wanted. They were not brought into the firing-line ; they were sent home.

While the Indian contingent had been having so many disappointments and undergoing such hardships, events had moved apace in the Valley of the Nile. By the middle of April the concentration on the frontier was completed. Eleven thousand troops had been massed at and beyond Wady Halfa. These figures seem insignificant to a generation which has passed through the Great War ; but 1896 had a different point of view. And Kitchener, as Sirdar, had difficulties to face which, as Secretary for War, he escaped.

The same thoroughness which characterized his administration at Whitehall dominated it during the nineties. He no more allowed himself to be hurried into taking a decision when he was 46 years of age than he did in 1914 when he reversed these numbers and was 64. He was determined that no serious operations should take place until a strong reserve of stores had been accumulated at the front. He allowed the army to wait as his railway steadily grew. His battalions were distributed in three principal fortified camps, Halfa, Sarras, and Akasha, while supplies and railway material continued to pour south at the utmost capacity of the transport.

Kitchener spent April at Wady Halfa supervising and hastening the extension of the railway and the

accumulation of stores. On 1st May he moved on to Akasha. It so happened that just as the Sirdar entered the camp a small detachment of friendly Arabs arrived and brought the news that enemy camelmen had attacked them some 4 miles from Akasha. This aggression showed that Ansars were possibly in the neighbourhood in some force. A reconnoitring party was therefore despatched to search the vicinage and to cut off any hostile patrols that might be found.

This task was entrusted to Major Burn-Murdoch. He rode away with four British officers and 240 lances. They searched the country within a radius of 7 or 8 miles. At first they saw nothing suspicious. Just as their outriders were about to debouch from a long, sandy defile, flanked on either side by rocky peaks and impracticable ravines, they found, in the open ground in front of the gorge, a strong force of Dervishes numbering 1,500 foot and 250 horse. The appearance of these men was menacing. The cavalry was already advancing to attack, their right flank backed up by camelry. Behind were the spearmen.

The British officer grasped the situation in the twinkling of an eye. Without the loss of a second he made up his mind to retreat so as to have the support of his infantry. He instantly gave the order. His squadron wheeled about and began to retire. The Ansar cavalry at once charged, and, plunging into the gorge, attacked the Egyptian horsemen in the rear. Both forces were caught in the jam. There was a crush, a squeeze, a stoppage. The dust raised by the horses' hoofs made it impossible to distinguish friend from foe. But Burn-Murdoch kept his head. With him were his British officers who had led the column during its advance. They were now at the rear and nearest the enemy. They maintained their ground so stoutly and played such havoc with their swords and revolvers that they held the defile and beat back the Ansar horse. After some little time the Dervishes began to retire.

Pegging away at his job, never in a hurry but never stopping, the end of May saw Kitchener in a position to

move forward from Akasha. His supplies at that point were plentiful. His railway was in good shape. It had gone forward, during the latter days of the month, at the rate of a mile a day. Everything was ready. Nine thousand men, with ample supplies, were collected within striking distance of the enemy.

While all this preparatory work had been going on, some strange fatality threw a soporific spell over the forces of the Khalifa. Their leaders were not blind. Their spies were everywhere. Of course, they did not know when the blow would fall. That was kept a secret. But they understood full well that, sooner or later, the avalanche would descend upon them. Yet they did nothing to prevent this destructive engine from being built up, piece by piece, under their very eyes.

Lethargy, somnolence, torpidity held them in its grip. Supine, inactive, indolent, they seemed to invite annihilation. They were not cowards. They were not paschal lambs awaiting slaughter. There were 3,000 fighting men. They had rifles and ammunition. They had chieftains of proven valour. But they were outnumbered. Their foes had better arms. And yet they would not budge. "Obstinate and fatuous to the last," says Churchill, "they dallied and paltered on the fatal ground, until sudden, blinding, inevitable catastrophe fell upon them from all sides at once and swept them out of existence as a military force."¹

¹ Ibid., p. 128.

CHAPTER XII

FIRKET

IF the Arab leader seemed to be absolutely indifferent as to what went on in Kitchener's camp, the Englishman was keenly alive in regard to what was transpiring in the enemy lines. So well informed were the Egyptian Government forces that Major Wingate, who had charge of the Intelligence Service, was able to issue to every officer in the Khedivial Army a plan of the Khalifa's Firket arrangements, a list of the Emirs and the troops under their command, and a memorandum of their organization and usual dispositions.

The Commander, whose indolence was destined to play such havoc with his master's interests, was Emir Hammuda. When Wad Bishara, the Governor of Dongola, saw that week after week passed and this officer did nothing to interfere with the consolidation of the Egyptian position, he ordered his subordinate, Osman Azrak, to succeed the indifferent Hammuda. But the latter held on to his post with the same tenacity with which he adhered to his passivity. He would neither move nor be moved. It is, therefore, not positively known whether Osman Azrak had or had not superseded his indolent companion in arms when the attack was made on 6th June.¹ But that detail is of minor importance. It was too late at that moment to prevent the impending blow from falling. The Sirdar then knew all that was necessary for his purposes. The Wingate memorandum told him that—

“Most of the rifles possessed by the Dervishes are cut short to decrease the weight, and the ammunition, which is mostly made at Omdurman, is of bad quality and badly gauged. The supply available appears to be ample.

¹ Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

"Many men of the Jaalin and other Nile tribes are said to be anxious to side with the Government, and are desirous of surrendering at the first opportunity.

"The Dervish supplies at Firket are inconsiderable, but they are said to have food supplies at Suarda.

"There are very few Dervishes at Mograka and Suarda, and only sufficient at Suarda to guard the Beit-el-Mal¹ and look after the women and children collected there.

"There are a few boats at Firket, and a few more plying between Suarda and Firket."²

The Sirdar was, therefore, thoroughly posted. He was able to base his plans for the approaching offensive upon accurate information. His objective was not merely to expel the enemy from Firket but to annihilate the force which was concentrated at that place. Had he desired solely to carry it by assault, he would not have waited so long. A smaller force would have sufficed. When he saw, however, that Hammuda was glued to the spot and was suffering from what amounted to cerebral sleeping sickness, Kitchener determined to take advantage of the opportunity which Fate presented to him upon a silver platter.

There are two approaches from Akasha to Firket. Their names indicate the difference between them. One is known as the "desert route" and the other as the "river route". Both start from the same sandy valley, the Firket Khor. About a mile away another *Khor* leads to the Nile. It is there that the "river route" begins, which, though so called, does not follow the waterway, but merely touches it from time to time.

The distance from Akasha to Firket is approximately 18 miles. The "desert route" afforded fairly easy going. The "river route" struck the torpid mind of Hammuda as being impassable. If he gave the subject a thought, he probably dismissed the possibility of his enemy making use of it. And it was this assumption that Kitchener capitalized. He determined to attack the Ansars both from the "river route" and from the

¹ Treasury storehouse.

² Atteridge, op. cit., p. 180.

"desert route". The latter column was made up principally of mounted cavalry. It was placed under the orders of Major Burn-Murdoch. It was composed of—

"Captain Young's Horse Battery, 6 guns.

"The 1st North Staffordshire, Machine-gun section, 2 Maxims.

"Six squadrons of Cavalry, 800 sabres.

"Major Tutway's Camel Corps, 670 rifles.

"The 12th Sudanese, 717 officers and men."¹

Major Burn-Murdoch had, all told, 2,400 men under his command. "His orders were that they were to be in position on the hills east of Firket at half-past four on Sunday morning. The hour of sunrise was eighteen minutes past five; and they were told that at about five o'clock they would hear the fire of the river column as it came into action. Burn-Murdoch was to keep his own force well back, so as to be out of the field of fire of the river column, and, as soon as he heard it, he was to open his artillery on the Dervishes."²

Kitchener took personal charge of the river column. It was composed of two batteries of mountain guns, two Maxims, manned by the 2nd Connaught Rangers, a few cavalymen for scouting purposes, and three infantry divisions of three brigades each.

The infantry column began to march out of Akasha at 3.30 in the afternoon of 6th June. The order of march was as follows: Lewis's brigade with the 10th Sudanese leading, two Maxim guns, and the artillery; MacDonald's brigade; Maxwell's brigade; and, lastly, the field hospitals. The Sirdar marched behind the artillery. The rear of the long column was clear of the camp by 4.30. About two hours later the mounted force started by the "desert route".³

"The track," records Mr. Winston Churchill's graphic pen, "led through broken, rocky ground, and was so narrow that it nowhere allowed a larger front to be formed than of four men abreast. In some

¹ Ibid., p. 182.

² Ibid., p. 183.

³ Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

places the sharp rocks and crumbling heaps of stone almost stopped the gun-mules altogether, while the infantry tripped and stumbled painfully. The moon had not risen, and the darkness was intense. Still the long procession of men, winding like a whip-lash between the jagged hills, toiled onward through the night, with no sound except the tramping of feet and the rattle of accoutrements. . . . At one place the column had to trickle through one narrow place in single file. There were already signs of the approaching dawn; the Dervish camp was near; the Sirdar and his staff began to look anxious. He sent many messages to the leading battalions to hurry; and the soldiers, although now very weary, ran and scrambled through the difficult passage like sheep crowding through a gate. By four o'clock the leading brigade had cleared the obstacle and the most critical moment seemed to have been passed."

The men gave a sigh of relief. Their officers felt that a great load had been removed from their shoulders. Those of them who had not forgotten how to pray addressed a word of thanks to the Lord of Hosts. Their prayers were still on their lips when suddenly, a mile to the southward, rose the sound of the beating of drums. The rattle had something ominous about it. It seemed like a summons from on high to prepare for death. It was interpreted as implying that the secret march had failed, that the enemy was on the alert and about to spring upon them. Everyone held his breath awaiting the decisive attack. Seconds passed. They became minutes. They multiplied. No further sound disturbed the silence of the night. And then those Christian officers who were about to launch civilization's blast against barbarism realized that those savages whom they were fighting, were answering a call to prayer, and were at that moment prostrating themselves before the one and only God of the Universe.

It was this intensive religious spirit that gave Mahdiism its great driving force. The economic basis of the agricultural life of the Sudan had been attacked when

the death knell of slavery in the Black Country had been decreed during Ismail's reign.

Muhammad Ahmad, a religious zealot, found a population seething with discontent because its purse-strings had been cut. He did what other leaders have done in other climes and at other times. He took advantage of the financial worries of the people to build upon industrial discontent a great religious edifice. He did not create a new creed. He had one at hand which admirably answered the spiritual needs of his fellow-tribesmen. He took Islam and made of the sword of Allah an arm which was doubly powerful, because it was used against men who stood for the abolition of slavery. He galvanized into a great force the fanaticism of a poor, ignorant, and warlike race.

After the first surprise of that Muslim call to prayer no sound came from afar to break the monotony of the rhythmic movement of the Egyptian army. The men pressed on in silence. No one spoke. The dials of their watches showed that it was already five o'clock when, from the side of the Firket mountain, a solitary shot was heard. It taught its own lesson. It told that the Ansar outposts knew of the approaching attack. Other cracks rang out in quick succession. A volley from the 10th Sudanese thundered forth its answer. And then in the distance came the report of a field gun. It was the artillery of Burn-Murdoch which spoke. Its detonation made known that he had brought his Maxims into action.

The operations of the two columns were simultaneous. The Muslims had barely left their prayer-rugs when they were caught between the upper and the nether millstone. There was no escape for them. All that the attacking force had to do was to press forward and deploy as fast as possible. Hammuda had slept too long and too peacefully. The Ansars' trust in God may have been inspiring, but their bended knee did not avail them as the English officers led the Egyptian troops against them. The Dervishes fought with the courage of despair ; but their fate was sealed. By 7.20 all firing

had ceased. The entire enemy camp was then in the hands of the Khedivial troops. The battle of Firket had been fought and won.

Kitchener determined to make a thorough job of it. He busied himself with the pursuit of the fugitives. He followed with his mounted troops as far as Mograka, 5 miles south of Firket. His cavalry, camelry, and horse artillery pressed the retreat as far as Suarda.

The Ansar losses in the engagement were heavy. More than 800 dead were left on the field ; there were 500 wounded and 600 prisoners. The Egyptian casualties were 1 British officer wounded, 20 native soldiers killed, and 83 wounded.¹ Mr. Hilliard Atteridge, the *Daily Chronicle* correspondent who assisted at the action, gives no figures. He confines himself to the general statement that—

“The enemy losses were enormous. How great they were we only gradually learned, but the field was strewn with their dead, wounded, and dying, and they lay in heaps in the village. In one corner of it there were 126. In one large court-yard that had been defended *à outrance* there were sixty. But it must be remembered that this was not a case of villagers defending their houses. Firket was really a camp of brigands. There had been no massacre. Quarter had been given to all who would accept it. The wounded were not only spared but taken care of.”²

Among the wounded men captured by the victorious Egyptians was a heavy, fat man with a fringe of white beard on his chin, and a good-natured expression on his round face. He was brought up to headquarters on a donkey. As soon as he saw Slatin Pasha, the Austrian who had been for so many years a prisoner in the Mahdi's camp, the Arab slipped off his beast and, throwing his sound left arm round the Pasha's neck, kissed his cheek. Slatin grasped the man's hand, his face wreathed in smiles, as they spoke together in Arabic. “You have found an old friend,” said the journalist to the Khedivial

¹ Ibid., p. 137.

² Atteridge, op. cit., p. 213.

officer. "Yes," he answered, "this is the Sheikh El Obeid, who was so kind to me when I was a prisoner in Omdurman." "A curious turn of the wheel of fortune," observed the newspaper man, "was now giving Slatin the chance of repaying the Emir's kindness." But that accidental circumstance is but of secondary importance. The whole setting shows that the prisoners were treated with great consideration.

The results of the capture of Firket were of far-reaching importance. They may be thus summarized:—

(1) Fifty miles of the Nile Valley passed under the control of the Khedivial army ;

(2) The purely Egyptian elements of the Egyptian troops responded nobly to the responsibility put upon them ;

(3) The Ansar frontier force was entirely destroyed ;

(4) The Dongola expedition had successfully traversed the difficult Batn-el Haga country and thus faced the open districts where everything favoured disciplined troops and modern weapons.

But these achievements meant nothing in comparison with the moral ascendancy which Firket gave to the reorganized Egyptian army. The 6th June, 1896, thus marks the beginning of an era in the history of the Sudan. The first chapter of this new story is a sad one. Pestilence and death dominate it. And yet it opened most auspiciously.

Two days after the fighting at Firket the head of the expedition was moved to Suarda, some 30 miles upstream. The advanced post was established there. Railway construction was expedited. By 16th June Akasha was reached. Thenceforth it was not a question of re-establishing an old line, but of creating a new one. British engineers made the sand fly. Embankments sprang up over night. By 24th July the first train ran across the blood-stained field of Firket. August saw engines ploughing into Kosheh, 6 miles further south. But, before the railway had reached the latter point, the advanced base of the army had been transferred to it.

Dysentery, not military strategy, dictated this change. The camp at Firket had become foul and insanitary. "The bodies of the dead, swelling and decaying in their shallow graves, assailed, as if in revenge, the bodies of the living."¹ The Nile there was full of green and rotting vegetation from the spongy swamps of Equatoria. The Dal Cataract, which lies opposite Firket, breaks the force of the stream and made the water at that season of the year dangerous and impure. It was felt that at Kosheh, in the open Nile, the men could get drinking water which was not contaminated. But, before the change was made, an epidemic of cholera, which had broken out in Cairo, began to creep up the Nile. Cases were reported at Asswan on 29th June. On the 30th Wady Halfa was known to be infected. The second week of July told the sad story that the new camp at Kosheh had been invaded.

The cholera germ drove out the bacillus of dysentery. The drastic remedy was worse than the old disease. The new epidemic was at the outset of a virulent form. Of the first 1,000 cases between Asswan and Suarda 800 proved fatal.

The total losses of the Dongola Expeditionary Force were :—

| | Attacks | Deaths |
|----------------|---------|------------------|
| British troops | 24 | 19 |
| Native troops | 406 | 260 |
| Followers | 788 | 640 ² |

These figures fail to tell the story of the havoc wrought by the epidemic. Death made its gruesome presence felt in a way which proved the mental ascendancy of the British officers. The English soldiers, who laughed at shot and shell on the battle-field, simply could not endure the onward march of the unseen enemy. The Egyptians forgot that they were fatalists and let their nerves go to pieces. The light-hearted, happy-go-lucky Sudanese ceased to know what merriment meant and became unnaturally taciturn. But they who suffered

¹ Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

² *Ibid.*, p. 142.

most, who best knew the serious nature of the danger which menaced them, the men of Woolwich and kindred schools, preserved a stony cheerfulness and looked the peril in the face without allowing their equanimity to suffer.

The officers had other troubles to gnaw away at their self-control. The Sirdar knew that his railway system would not suffice for the continued supply of the large force many miles ahead of it. He therefore organized an auxiliary boat service. It depended upon the wind for its driving power. That year old Boreas allowed the cholera to frighten him off the Nile. Never before, so runs the legend, had he failed, for more than five days at a time, to bring cool breezes to Egypt and the Sudan. That year, for forty consecutive days, at the critical period of the campaign the wind blew hot and adverse from the south. This perverseness made the boat service worthless.

Not only did the south wind thus insist upon blowing at the wrong time of the year, but the waters of the Nile refused to rise at the wonted date. This meant that the cataracts remained an impassable bar to navigation, for the only chance that *nuggars* have to pass these rocky barriers is to take advantage of high water. But finally the river began to rise, the cholera became less deadly and the wind veered to the north. An era of good luck appeared to be at hand. Optimism replaced gloom and cheerfulness supplanted pessimism. But the men who smiled did not know that a "Death March" was staring them in the face.

The distance from Kosheh, the Sirdar's headquarters, to Kerma, the first Ansar post, was by river 127 miles. Thirty miles may be cut off this distance by avoiding the bend of the Nile just opposite Kosheh. Kitchener determined to gain this mileage by marching his men across this loop to a point on the river known as Sadin Fanti. On 26th August, Lewis's brigade was given instructions to proceed thither and enforce the outlying post of Absarat. The entire distance which had to be traversed was 37 miles.

Twenty-four hours after the men had got under way a sand-storm overtook them. Nearly 300 men dropped out and staggered back to Kosheh. Before the column reached Sadin Fanti 1,700 more fell exhausted in their tracks. Out of one battalion of 700, only sixty marched into their new post, and they were parched.

A few days later torrential rains inundated the sun-baked sands. The water, pouring down the broad valleys, formed furious torrents in the narrower gorges. "More than 12 miles of railway was swept away. The rails were twisted and bent; the formation entirely destroyed. The telegraph wires were broken. The work of weeks was lost in a few hours. The advance was stopped as soon as it had been begun. At the moment when every military reason demanded speed and suddenness, a hideous delay became inevitable."¹

But Fate had still another prank to play. By tremendous exertions the gunboat *Zafir* had been made ready in time to take part in the expedition against Kerma. The army looked upon the vessel as its main bulwark. It symbolized the power of the Khedivial war machine. On 11th September many officers came to witness the trial trip of the *Zafir*. It was a gala day. There was great cheering when the whistle blew. But the stern paddle had hardly revolved twice when there was a loud report. A low-pressure cylinder had burst. The pride of the force was for the time being useless.

¹ Ibid., p. 147.

CHAPTER XIII

DONGOLA

Luck had favoured Kitchener during the opening days of his advance into the Black Country. It was most fortunate for the Sirdar that Hammuda was so congenitally indolent that he had permitted the Government forces to fortify Akasha without even attempting to harass their lines of communication. Fortune was most propitious to the Khedivial troops when it awoke Hammuda from his torpidity long enough for him to accept battle at Firket.

The man who had been thus smiled upon by Destiny was too much of a gentleman to complain when the breaks went against him. He accepted the frowns of Kismet as he had received her smiles and continued to hammer away at his daily task. The result was that, even if the *Zafir* had to be taken out of commission on 11th September, the advance of the army was not delayed. On the contrary, on 13th September, the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Brigades occupied Kaderma, a point in the "Military Sudan" some 25 miles south of Sadin Fanti. Foreiq, another mere name, about 5 miles further up the Nile, was taken one day later. Here the flotilla overtook the troops. Thereafter the boats kept pace with the marching men. On the 16th the 4th Brigade arrived. The concentration of the force was then complete.¹

Reports reached the Egyptian camp that Kerma, just south of the Third Cataract and, by land, some 20 miles south of Foreiq, was strongly held. Wad Bishara, the energetic young Emir in command at Dongola, had tried to put his province in a state of defence. One of the weapons used by him was propaganda. He made the most of the cholera epidemic. He circulated the

¹ Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

story that the entire Egyptian army, with the exception of Kitchener and a few kindred spirits, had been carried away by the scourge. He capitalized that blowing up of the *Zafir*. He stressed to the utmost the interest that Allah was taking in their cause by holding up the north wind.

But Wad Bishara did not confine his activities to such trivialities. He worked. He built and armed river forts. His guns were few and weak. But that was hardly his fault, as energy cannot create cannon. He held his men in line although their loyalty had been damped by the holocaust at Firket. So indifferent were they to the advance of the Government forces that his patrols were reluctant to cut the telegraph wires which were hung temptingly from poles in the desert—while the real cable lay hidden under the banks and sometimes in the waters of the Nile.¹

Before dawn on 19th September, the Egyptian army moved forward to attack Kerma. But Wad Bishara was not Hammuda. He did not wait its coming. He felt that his position was not sufficiently strong for him to accept battle. He had accordingly slipped out during the preceding night and had transferred his troops to the opposite side of the river. He took up his position at Hafir, 6 miles further south.

Kitchener was hot upon the trail of Wad Bishara. He threw his force across the Nile. "The sight which the army witnessed was thrilling. Beyond the floodwaters of the river, backed against a sky of staring blue and in the blazing sunlight, the whole of the enemy's position was plainly visible. The long row of shelter trenches was outlined by the white smoke of musketry and dotted with the bright-coloured flags waving defiantly in the wind and with the still brighter flashes of the guns. Behind the entrenchments and among the mud houses and enclosures strong bodies of the *jibba*-clad Arabs were arrayed. . . . By the Nile all the tops of the palm-trees were crowded with daring riflemen, whose positions were indicated by the smoke-puffs of

¹ Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, 201.

their rifles, or when some tiny black figure fell, like a shot rook, to the ground. In the foreground, the gunboats, panting and puffing up the river, were surrounded on all sides by spouts and spurts of water, thrown up by the shells and bullets. Again the flotilla drew near the narrow channel; again the watching army held their breath; and again they saw the leading boat, the *Metemmah*, turn and run down stream toward safety, pursued by the wild cheers of the Arabs. It was evident that the gunboats were not strong enough to silence the Dervish fire."¹

It was Lieut. Beatty, later known to fame as Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty, who, recognizing that his gunboats were not strong enough to silence the Ansar fire, daringly ran the gauntlet of the batteries on shore by going full speed ahead and steaming straight for Dongola.² While we say this upon the authority of Lord Kitchener's authorized biographer, who gives Beatty credit for this manœuvre, Mr. Winston Churchill informs his reader that it was the Sirdar who conceived the plan and another naval officer, De Rougemont, who executed it. But, however this may be, the really important fact is that Wad Bishara held his ground and, after two and a half hours of steady firing, had not been dislodged.

This stubborn resistance required a change in the plans of the attacking force. Instructions were accordingly issued that the flotilla was to run past the entrenchments without trying to quench their fire. To support and cover this movement, three batteries of artillery were brought into action from a swampy island near the scene of the battle. Infantry battalions were also moved along the river opposite the Arab position. The result was such a barrage that the boats were able to get through and steam towards Dongola.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning when this decisive result was obtained. The action did not end then and there. The firing, however, became desultory. The Ansars had been defeated because the gunboats had

¹ Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

² Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, 202.

pierced their lines. But the Dervishes had not been routed. They held their ground. Their *moral* remained undaunted ; they did not admit that they had lost the day. On the contrary, they brandished their rifles ; they waved their flags ; they shouted defiance. Their intrepid leader, Wad Bishara, however, had been wounded. So had Osman Azrak, one of his chief lieutenants. But his wounds did not deter Wad Bishara from maintaining his position. What counselled him to retreat was the fact that he feared that Kitchener would march along the right bank of the Nile to Dongola, and cross there under cover of his gunboats. Before morning dawned he evacuated Hafir and retreated on Dongola.

. It is useless to speculate as to what the Sirdar would have done had Wad Bishara held on to Hafir. We know, however, that Kitchener made no attempt to use the right bank of the Nile. He crossed the river with his entire force, cavalry, camelry, and guns, and occupied the scene of the battle of the previous day. His losses had been very slight ; one British sergeant and one Egyptian officer had been killed. Commander Colville and eleven native soldiers made up the total list of the wounded. Yet, somehow or another, the battle of Hafir appealed to the imagination of both London and Cairo. Both the Queen and the Khedive sent telegrams of congratulation to the victorious troops. Hafir is officially counted in records of service as a general action. A special clasp was struck to commemorate it. "Of all the instances of cheaply bought glory which the military history of recent years affords," records the author of *The River War*, "Hafir is the most remarkable." ¹

While it is true that the Khedivial losses in the action were insignificant, American children are still taught that the battle of New Orleans, fought on 8th January, 1815, was one of the greatest engagements in history, although but eight Americans lost their lives on that field. They are told that the blood of these heroes

¹ Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

consolidated the independence of the United States and that the smallness of the American losses proved the generalship of the Tennessean who led the defending army. Measured by this same standard, Hafir was certainly worthy of "special clasps". That battle opened up the door to Dongola. It was not only a triumph over the armed forces of the Khalifa but a victory over the unseen hosts of cholera. It took a big man to lead an army forward on the morrow of an epidemic. For the moral courage shown by him in the face of so many trying ordeals Kitchener well deserved the praise which Mr. Winston Churchill appears to begrudge him.

The wounded Wad Bishara continued his retreat during the 20th. He marched all day, reaching Dongola in the evening. Undeterred by his wounds he reoccupied the town and began to make preparations for its defence. The Khedivial gunboats gave him no rest. The *Abu Klea*, under Lieutenant Beatty, R.N., led the attack. The Ansars answered him. But the Khedivial flotilla kept up an unceasing bombardment on the town and its defences. And while this firing was going on, Kitchener and his army marched towards Dongola.

A full moon facilitated their progress. It shone with tropical brilliancy in a cloudless sky. The hours passed. No enemy appeared. The sun rose. Seven o'clock came, and finally an Arab force was discovered in the distance. It was but a small one, but as Wad Bishara was known to make light of numbers, it was thought that the little band would stand and fight. It waited until the numerical superiority of the Egyptian troops became obvious. It then retreated in excellent order towards Debbah and the south.

The Khedivial infantry halted at Dongola. It found that detachments from Beatty's flotilla had already occupied the place. The Star and Crescent of the Egyptian army floated from the *Mudiria*. The garrison of 400 black Jehadia had not only surrendered but had begun to fraternize with the Sudanese from

the gunboats. The Government cavalry and camelry, therefore, did not tarry at Dongola but started in pursuit of the enemy. Many small parties were captured. The wounded Wad Bishara and Osman Azrak nevertheless made good their escape across the desert to Metamma. The occupation of Dongola terminated the campaign of 1896.

The Sirdar's own words permit us to visualize what had been accomplished. He wrote :—

“ The result of these operations has been to completely stop the constant Dervish raids on the villages between Asswan and Wady Halfa, to add some 450 miles of the Nile Valley to Egyptian territory, 300 miles of which may be described as of great fertility, and to relieve, to their intense delight, the large and suffering population of Dongola from the barbarous and tyrannical rule of savage and fanatical Baggaras.”¹

Public opinion in England looked upon the capture of Dongola as meaning the approaching collapse of Mahdiism. In the early days of the Dongola Expedition the man in the street appeared to regard it as a somewhat rash enterprise. After Firket and Hafir there was a reaction. Everybody seemed to take it for granted that Omdurman and Khartum could be captured without an effort. London overlooked the fact that a mere detachment of the Khalifa's forces had been engaged in the Dongola province, and that although the Khedivial authorities held the river up to Merawi, cataracts near there barred all progress southwards for the Egyptian gunboats. When the Sirdar was in London in November, 1896, he was asked by an interviewer : “ Do you suppose that the Khalifa's power is in any way broken ? ” As clear-headed in 1896 as he was in 1914, when everybody else thought that the Great War would last but a few weeks, he answered : “ It is quite a mistake to suppose so.”² One of the outworks of Mahdiism had been carried, but its citadel was still intact.

Kitchener had not gone to England to be lionized

¹ Atteridge, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

² *Ibid.*, p. 328.

or to be interviewed. He had repaired to London in order to urge a further advance. His original mandate limited his operations to the occupation of Dongola. That result had been achieved. It was his duty to stop and attempt nothing further. As a strategist, he considered it worse than useless to retain the Egyptian army at the end of a little military railway, in a hostile region, and with a long and vulnerable line of communications behind him. But as a soldier, he had nothing to do but obey. He knew that a French expedition was moving from the Congo towards the upper stretches of the White Nile. His political instinct told him that if Marchand got to his objective before he himself was firmly installed in that zone, the possibility of a war between France and England would loom large upon the horizon. He therefore urged that he be allowed to proceed, and to proceed quickly. He received the instructions for which he asked. He was also given the promise of a fair proportion of British troops to join up with the Egyptian force.¹

Kitchener returned to the Sudan in the first week of December. He saw the imperative necessity of a rapid advance. But, always thorough, it was clear to him that if an army equal to the task before it was to be adequately supplied and to be able to destroy the power of Abdullah and reach the Upper Nile Basin before the French, its progress must be by river as well as by rail. The movements of the Marchand expedition counselled speed. The poverty of Egypt compelled economy. Common sense called for extreme care and the elimination of any mishap. "Three daring and ambitious schemes presented themselves," we learn from *The River War*, "(1) the line followed by the Desert Column in 1884 from Korti to Metamma; (2) the celebrated, if not notorious, route from Suakin to Berber; and (3) across the Nubian desert from Korosko or Wady Halfa to Abu Hamed."²

A world of argument could be adduced on behalf of each of the three routes. It will be recalled that when

¹ Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, 205.

² Churchill, *op. cit.*, 168.

Gordon was surrounded at Khartum and the question of his relief was being debated with academic nicety by the Gladstone Cabinet, military experts were then unable to agree in regard to the best way of getting to the capital of the Sudan. Time was then of the essence of the problem. Gordon's safety depended upon his early rescue. But, records Colonel Sir William F. Butler, "during the early summer months of 1884, the strife of routes went on. Things almost impossible now to credit were done." The various counsellors of the Executive urged their different projects of relief upon a reluctant Government, and the lone Englishman in a sea of black faces was left alone while the sand in his hour-glass was disappearing.¹

Kitchener determined that if Marchand were going to get to the Upper White Nile before him, the Frenchman would not do so because valuable time had been lost in discussing a question for which Gordon had paid so dearly. The Sirdar's decision, says Sir George Arthur, "was as bold as it was considered. He decided to lay the railway across the desert from Halfa to Abu Hamed and make that his main line of advance. This tract of desert was known to be waterless throughout, except at one point—the bitter Murat wells. It had not been surveyed, a large force of Dervishes might conceivably lurk on the other side to hold us off from Abu Hamed, and several expert engineers shook their heads as to the feasibility of laying the railway line at all. But the Sirdar had balanced the chances carefully, and having made up his mind, steeled it against argument. He would travel by rail from Halfa to Abu Hamed, and on a 3 ft. 6 in. gauge."²

This extract gives as perfect a picture of Kitchener the soldier, the man of action, and the statesman as could possibly be compressed into so short a space. It was as soldier that he examined the various plans, as a man of action that he picked out a solution and then

¹ *Charles George Gordon*, by Colonel Sir William F. Butler, London, Macmillan (1889), p. 222.

² Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, 207.

closed his ears to further discussion. But it was the statesman in him that held out for a 3 ft. 6 in. gauge. The Sirdar adhered to this latter point in the teeth of formidable opposition from Lord Cromer.

The champion of the Egyptian Treasury urged that a 3 ft. 3 in. track should be laid. Such a railway naturally costs less to build than does a wider road-bed. There were, at that time, great quantities of metre-gauge (3 ft. 3 in.) sleepers in Egypt. A number of locomotives of that calibre were ready and could be cheaply obtained. Though the Alexandria-Cairo-Luxor gauge was then 4 ft. 8½ in., Cecil Rhodes' scheme for the Cape to Cairo railway was then taking shape, and Kitchener was determined that his contribution to it should conform to the South African standard of 3 ft. 6 in.¹

Work was begun on New Year's Day, 1897. A survey about 10 miles ahead of construction work was all that was possible. The great problem was one of water. Kitchener backed his judgment—or his luck—on finding water. He found it. And he kept driving his men at their work of railway building until by 20th July, 120 miles had been laid, and Abu Hamed reached. But it was one thing to construct a line of steel to that point and another to hold it. The Sirdar could afford to take no chances, as Abu Hamed was the key to his future operations. To make sure of not losing that strategic station he secretly concentrated at Merawi a brigade under General Hunter.

One of the Khalifa's lieutenants, Mahmud, was at Berber with a strong force when Hunter was still at Merawi. All these places, Merawi, Berber, and Abu Hamed, are on the Nile, and the latter lies practically half-way between the two other towns. The opposing forces raced to Abu Hamed and fought for it. The fight was short and fierce. It took place on 7th August. On the Ansar side 250 men out of 400 were killed. The Sudanese regiments in the Khedivial service lost but twenty-one blacks and held the coveted junction.

¹ *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

The news was telegraphed to Kitchener at Merawi. Ever practical, his answer was to press forward to Abu Hamed with as many men as he could muster. Mahmud caught the meaning of such a display of force and hearkening to the admonitions of prudence decided to abandon Berber. Arab "Friendlies" were thus able to occupy that important centre on 31st August without firing a shot.

CHAPTER XIV

BERBER AND ATBARA

LORD SALISBURY looked upon the occupation of Berber as an event of major importance. As early as 14th August, 1885, he had said in a letter to the British Consul-General at Cairo that he supposed that "if Egypt becomes master of Berber, it also becomes master of Khartum, and the railway to the coast can hardly fail to follow in due time". He no doubt held to this same view in August, 1897. But the interval between the occupation of Abu Hamed and the final advance on Khartum was a period of much anxiety. Sir Herbert Kitchener's force depended practically entirely on the desert railway for its supplies. Lord Cromer was haunted by the idea that some European adventurer, of the type once familiar in India, might turn up at Khartum and advise the Ansars to make frequent raids across the Nile below Abu Hamed, with a view to cutting the communications of the Anglo-Egyptian forces with Wady Halfa.¹ Both Lord Salisbury and Lord Cromer, therefore, as well as the Sirdar, saw the necessity for strengthening the Khedivial possession of Berber.

The main strategic point of the Sudan, to secure which a special campaign might well have been necessary, had come to Kitchener like manna from heaven. "But," Sir George Arthur asks, "could he avail himself of the unexpected gift and occupy the place in force? The only troops to hand, not 3,000 in all, were 130 miles this side of Berber, at Abu Hamed, from which the railway, on which all his calculations had been based, was still 110 miles distant. If he sent a force of any size to hold Berber, how could he supply it? And in any case,

¹ *Life of Robert Marquis of Salisbury*, by Lady Gwendolen Cecil, London, Hodder and Stoughton (1931), iii, 234.

was it safe to send a few troops there, with Mahmud and 12,000 men only 80 miles off at Metamma, and Osman Digna with another couple of thousand at Adarama—not to mention the ex-garrison of Berber moving within a few miles of the place itself? ”¹

Kitchener accepted the gift offered by Providence. He felt that the game was worth the candle. On 5th September, Hunter with 350 blacks reached Berber and hoisted the Egyptian flag. Other troops followed. An advanced post was established some 3 miles further south, where the Atbara River flows into the Nile. Of course, the Khalifa heard of all this. He construed this display of force as a challenge to Omdurman itself. Feeling that an attack on his stronghold was imminent he forbade Mahmud to advance.

When Berber fell Osman Digna was at Adarama, a station on the Atbara practically equidistant from Metamma, Mahmud's headquarters, and Berber. The cunning Osman realized that the loss of the latter place would make his position at Adarama not only valueless but precarious. He did not love Mahmud, but common hatreds draw even arch-enemies together. He therefore decided to abandon his useless and dangerous post and join the Kordofan emir.

As soon as Wingate's intelligence service had apprised Kitchener of the withdrawal of Osman Digna, the Sirdar determined to assure himself of the fact, to reconnoitre the country, and to destroy the military stores of the enemy. By 29th October this triple mission had been accomplished. And while this work had been going on the flotilla had patrolled the Nile south of Berber and as far as Metamma. During these crucial weeks Mahmud remained motionless. But he was not to blame: the Khalifa would not let him move. Abdullah had his own ideas of strategy and concentrated his attention upon fortifying Omdurman. Meanwhile the railway was stretching further and further to the south. The great strain which the sudden occupation of Berber had thrown upon the transport was to some

¹ Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, 213.

extent relieved.¹ Lord Salisbury and Lord Cromer breathed more easily. So did Sir Herbert Kitchener and the gallant officers under him.

But, while military success was thus crowning the Sirdar's efforts, he was passing through what the French call a *mauvais quart d'heure*. General Sir Francis Grenfell, who had previously been the head of the Egyptian troops, returned to Cairo on 8th October, as G.O.C. of the British Army of Occupation. Kitchener had been led to understand that this arrival would mean the supersession of himself in command of the whole expedition, when reinforced by British units. Of course, the Sirdar had no right to complain if such a plan were put into execution. Yet it took a big man to prove equal to such a call upon his loyalty. Kitchener played cricket. A letter written by him to Sir Francis Grenfell on 14th October, 1897, is admirable in text and tone. Its opening sentences may well be quoted. They read :—

“ My dear General,

“ I should like to know if everything is going on quite to your satisfaction, and if there is anything I can do. Do we keep you sufficiently informed of the position and numbers of the troops ? ”²

One of the subjects discussed in this letter was the fate of Kassala. It will be recalled that the Italians had a garrison there, but that it had been sorely pressed ever since the Abyssinians had handled King Humbert's troops so roughly. Kitchener's note points out that, in his opinion, handing over Kassala to the Dervishes would render his position insecure and would necessitate either the immediate sending of a British expedition or the enforced evacuation of Berber. The letter stresses the fact that the Italians apparently insist upon abandoning Kassala without delay.

That the Sirdar was not mistaken as to the desire of Rome to get out of Kassala is confirmed by what Lord Cromer writes. We read in *Modern Egypt* that—
‘ the Italians, who but a short time before had been

¹ Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

² Archer, *op. cit.*, i, 215.

eager to occupy the Kassala district, were clamorous to abandon a possession which they found expensive and of doubtful utility.”¹ Yet, notwithstanding the strategic importance of Kassala, the eagerness of the Italians to abandon it, and the urgency of Kitchener’s appeal, those who had the power to decide the question did nothing. He accordingly telegraphed to Lord Cromer on 18th October that—

“I do not think the gravity of the military situation is fully realized. Holding our long line, which is liable to attack at many points, leaves me with a small force at Berber, a place most difficult to defend, and without supports. My suspended design to move the Suakin garrison here cannot be postponed much longer. The reconnaissance of Mahmud’s position proves that we have in front of us a force of Dervishes of better fighting qualities and far greater numerical strength than we have ever met before. In face of this the financial authorities appear to be unable to grant what I think necessary for military efficiency and to carry out the military programme. My estimate of the situation and military requirements may be wrong, but, feeling as I do my inability to cope with the difficulties and the grave responsibilities of the position in which I find myself, I beg to tender my resignation to Your Lordship.”²

It is obvious that Sir Francis Grenfell’s presence at Cairo had nothing to do with this proffered resignation. Lord Cromer was an intellectual giant, and he understood the telegram in the spirit in which it had been written. He could picture the Sirdar in his stifling little mud hut at Berber, lying awake at night or wrestling alone during the white-hot hours of day with columns of figures and calculations of supplies, and labouring all the time to find some way of reconciling the safety of his army with the penury of Cairo. The great diplomatist did not for a moment entertain the idea of allowing Kitchener to resign. The obvious answer was sent to Berber. It said: “Come to Cairo at once

¹ Cromer, *op. cit.*, ii, 95.

² Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, 219.

to discuss matters." "Kitchener arrived this afternoon" is an entry in Sir Francis Grenfell's diary on 11th November. "We rode to meet him; he looked rather ill, but was very pleasant to us."¹

The Sirdar's visit to Cairo was productive of important results. One of them was that on Christmas Day Kassala was occupied by an Egyptian force commanded by Colonel Parsons. Kitchener left Cairo on 13th December. He was informed that he was authorized in the following year to make an advance on a larger scale backed by British troops and that he would not be superseded by another British General.

During Kitchener's absence from the Sudan the Khalifa had become convinced that the "Turks" did not intend to advance any further till the next flood of the river. Abdullah probably construed the Sirdar's visit to Cairo as proof of this fact. Mahmud had never abandoned his idea of an attack upon Berber. He probably was able to persuade his chief that advantage should be taken of the obvious safety of Omdurman to press forward against the Khedivial forces. The Khalifa consented. He gave instructions that the whole strength of the Dervish army should be exerted to drive back the invaders. All troops in Omdurman were ordered north. Kerreri was made the Ansar point of concentration.

The Sirdar was returning to Berber when rumours of the extended enemy advance reached him. His reply to the challenge was to order a general massing of the Egyptian army at Berber, to telegraph to Lord Cromer asking for a British brigade, and to close the Suakin-Berber route. Here is what we read in *Modern Egypt* about this introduction of purely English elements into the winning of the Sudan :—

"In the Nile Valley, no considerable change took place in the situation for some months after the occupation of Berber. It was clear that, without the aid of British troops, Khartum could not be retaken, but nothing definite had as yet been decided as to their employment.

¹ Ibid., p. 220.

All hesitation was eventually removed by the force of circumstances. Towards the end of 1897, reports were rife of an intention on the part of the Dervishes to take the offensive. . . . I had encouraged the Sirdar to ask for British troops directly he thought their presence necessary. On the first day of 1898 he sent me an historic telegram which virtually sealed the fate of the Sudan. 'General Hunter,' he said, 'reports confirming news of a Dervish advance. I think that British troops should be sent to Abu Hamed and that reinforcements should be sent to Egypt in case of necessity. The fight for the Sudan would appear to be likely to take place at Berber.'"¹

The War Office had been nervous about the situation in the Sudan since the hasty occupation of Berber. It had not forgotten 1884 and 1885. It lost no time, therefore, in the despatch of British troops. The 1st Battalions of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, of the Lincoln Regiment, and of the Cameron Highlanders were formed into a brigade and moved from Cairo to the Sudan. The 1st Battalion of the Seaforth Highlanders was brought from Malta to Egypt and held in immediate readiness to reinforce the troops at the front. Other elements were despatched to replace those sent to the Black Country, so that the strength of the English Army occupying Egypt was not diminished.² The British brigade told off to support the Sirdar was placed under the command of General Gatacre.

By the end of January, the Anglo-Egyptian forces lay encamped along the Nile from Abu Hamed to the mouth of the Atbara. Their point of greatest concentration was Berber. The Dervish army was then at Kerreri. It tarried. The burning question of the command had arisen. The Khalifa announced that he would lead the True Believers. Some friends begged him not to expose his sacred person. He acquiesced and looked round for a substitute. Factional differences made it impossible for him to find any lieutenant upon whom all could agree. The result was that the Khalifa

¹ Cromer, *op. cit.*, ii, 95.

² Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

broke up his camp in disgust and marched away with his army.

Everybody, including Wingate's admirable intelligence service, believed that the breaking up of the Kerreri camp meant the end of any early attempt on the part of the Ansars to assume the offensive. All hands settled down to prepare for the monotony of a tiresome spring and to await the flood of the Nile before pressing on to Khartum. But such calculations overlooked the personal equation. Mahmud was at Metamma, some 70 miles south of the mouth of the Atbara. He had 15,000 men with him. He decided that if Abdullah preferred to retreat he would not do so, but would, on the contrary, attack Berber on his own account. Suiting the action to the word, mid-February saw him crossing the Nile, and preparing to attempt with a small force what the Khalifa had refrained from hazarding with a large army.

Mahmud marched his followers, perhaps 20,000 in all, inclusive of women and children, to Aliob, a point on the east bank of the Nile about 40 miles north of Metamma and approximately 30 miles south of the confluence of the Atbara and the Nile. He dallied there until 19th March, when he moved across country, making for Hudi, a station on the Atbara some 15 miles, as a crow flies, from the mouth of that stream. His strategy was to outflank the Anglo-Egyptian left and, after quickly disposing of the outposts on the Nile, to descend on Berber from the east. But he overestimated his cunning. Two could play the same game. Kitchener got to Hudi before he did: Mahmud, therefore, had to keep on marching further upstream. He finally struck the river at Nakheila, some 22 miles above Hudi. The Dervish leader thus put himself so far away from the Nile that it was impossible for him to reach Berber except by long marches across a waterless desert.

Mahmud did not attack Kitchener when the two armies came face to face. The Sirdar did not spring upon him. For a whole fortnight in the grilling sun

the two hostile camps sat and watched each other. Cavalry detachments pin-pricked one another. Divided counsel interfered with the Ansar dash. Hesitation overcame the self-willed Kitchener. Doubt gnawed at his wonted self-assurance. On 1st April, he got into telegraphic communication with Lord Cromer and sent this message :—

“I am rather perplexed by the situation here. Mahmud remains stationary and his army is very badly off for supplies, and deserters keep coming to us, but not in large numbers as I had expected. He is waiting apparently for instructions from the Khalifa before advancing or retiring. Here we are well-off and healthy, fresh bread every second day, and fresh meat every day. Yesterday I discussed the situation with Generals Gatacre and Hunter ; the former was inclined to attack Mahmud's present position, the latter to wait here. . . . I have decided not to change present policy for three days, before which something definite will, I hope, be known. I shall be glad to know your views on the subject.”¹

Lord Cromer was somewhat taken aback by this telegram. It did not read like Kitchener, who was known never to shirk responsibility. The point which made the deepest impression upon the British Consul-General, however, was the fact that General Hunter doubted the wisdom of attacking. Lord Cromer knew him to be a fighting General, and inferred that Hunter, who understood the strong and weak sides of the Egyptian army, hesitated to attack because he was unwilling to risk what might possibly become a hand-to-hand encounter between the Egyptians and the Dervishes in the “heavy bush” which surrounded the site where the two forces were encamped. The diplomatist conferred with Sir Francis Grenfell and on 2nd April telegraphed the Sirdar :—

“The following observations are not to be regarded as instructions. It is for you to form a final opinion on their value, as they are merely remarks on the position

¹ Cromer, *op. cit.*, ii, 98.

as it strikes me at a distance. In case you should think it desirable to act contrary to the view to which I incline, I have no desire to cripple your full liberty of action." And, after having summarized the arguments against an immediate attack, Lord Cromer added : "Patience, therefore, is what I am inclined to advise. I am disposed to think you had better not attack for the present, but wait your opportunity for action, and allow events to develop. The above is fully concurred in by General Grenfell."¹

Before the Sirdar had received this telegram he sent a message to Lord Cromer to the effect that Generals Gatacre and Hunter and himself thought an attack on Mahmud's position advisable and would make it on 6th April. But, the next day, Kitchener telegraphed Cairo that in view of Lord Cromer's opinion he would postpone action. This brought forth a message from the Consul-General which was typical of Lord Cromer. Its concluding words were : "I leave the decision to you, only again assuring you of full support whatever you decide."

Lord Wolseley blamed Sir Herbert Kitchener for having consulted Lord Cromer. He wrote to his brother officer that :—

"You should not have asked such a question. You must know best. Men and governments at a distance are prone to panic and weak measures, and not to be trusted—no, not the best of them."² While this little rap over the knuckles was probably well deserved, Kitchener no doubt smiled when he received it. If we agree with Sir George Arthur, Lord Cromer was, perhaps, a little flattered at being consulted on military tactics. If this deduction be well founded, the Sirdar played good politics in thus burning incense to the all-powerful Consul-General, who was so close to the British Prime Minister that his correspondence with Lord Salisbury on official subjects "was more like that between colleagues in a Cabinet than between a chief and his agent".³

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

² Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, 225.

³ Cecil, *op. cit.*, iii, 206.

While the two armies were parching in the desert sun, because indecision held both of them in its grip, the Khedivial flotilla was sent upstream to threaten Shendi, opposite Metamma, "where Mahmud," writes Sir George Arthur, "had left many of his women. A few troops landed there," continues Lord Kitchener's biographer, "and took into gentle custody a number of these ladies—with the result that large parties of black followers deserted Mahmud in order to learn what had befallen their beloved."¹ We learn from Mr. Winston Churchill's book that the wives of the important emirs made their escape to Omdurman, "but that upwards of 650 women and children of inferior rank were taken prisoners and transported to the Atbara, where, in due course, they contracted new family ties with the Sudanese soldiery, and, as far as can be ascertained, lived happily ever afterwards."²

On 4th April, Kitchener moved in 5 miles nearer the enemy. On the 6th he was almost ready to spring. He decided, however, that the attack was to take place at dawn on the 8th. Somebody told him that that day was a Friday, and he determined to put off the assault for twenty-four hours. When reminded, however, that it was Good Friday he felt it was a fitting occasion for an act of liberation and did not change his plans.³ The charge was made just before the sun rose on the appointed date. After forty minutes of sharp fighting Mahmud was a prisoner, 2,000 of his men lay dead in their entrenchments and others had surrendered. A large number of those who had escaped subsequently died of wounds or thirst in the thick bush on the left bank of the river.

The victory was complete, but it cost many valuable lives. Of the British brigade, 4 officers and 104 non-commissioned officers and men, and of the Egyptian army, 5 British and 16 Egyptian officers, as well as 422 non-commissioned officers and men, were killed or wounded. The brunt of the Egyptian fighting fell on the black troops.³

¹ Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, 225.

² Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

³ Cromer, *op. cit.*, ii, 102.

The Anglo-Egyptian wounded suffered a great deal from lack of shade. Want of medical aid and appliances added to the pain and discomfort of these heroes. The Sirdar was much affected by the sufferings of those who had fought under his leadership. "Kitchener was very human for at least a quarter of an hour," wrote an English officer. "And after the battle, as he rode along the cheering line of his men, white and black, his eyes were lit up and he was beaming with joy. So when Mahmud was led into his presence, and in reply to the question why he had brought death and destruction into his country answered sullenly, 'I have to do my duty the same as you,' the Sirdar only smiled and remarked that it was rather a good answer."¹

¹ Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, 228.

CHAPTER XV

OMDURMAN

WITH the laurels of Atbara adorning their banners, Kitchener's troops went into summer quarters. The men enjoyed a well-earned rest. But new problems confronted the Sirdar. London had, it is true, definitely authorized him to advance as soon as the Nile rose and had promised that more British troops would be sent, but disagreeable news came from Abyssinia.

It appeared that Menelik was in friendly touch with the Khalifa. An Abyssinian force moving towards Roserires, a point on the Blue Nile some 275 miles south-east of Khartum, had reached the Beni Shangul country. Rumour had it that Abyssinian messengers had arrived at Omdurman with a French flag and an ingenuous request that the Khalifa should carry it in the forefront of the battle.¹ It was also reported that Marchand had penetrated into the Bahr el Ghazal district and was continuing his march.²

The Sirdar had no way of testing the truth of all these tales about French intrigues. They did not disturb his equanimity. What they did was to make him doubly determined to begin his advance as early as possible. He went about matters with his usual thoroughness. His plans were drawn up early in May. He gave 20th August as the date of his advance. He made it clear that he would require another brigade of four British battalions, besides a regiment of cavalry, two batteries, and Maxims. He stressed the point that this programme did not admit of alterations.³

The War Office demurred somewhat, but finally

¹ We read in *The Story of the Khedivate*, by Edward Dickey, p. 475, that "a French flag was, I am told, found in Omdurman upon its capture by our troops". Dickey does not substantiate this statement.

² Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, 229.

³ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

assented. Then it fretted about the leadership of the forces which the Sirdar's insistence had obtained for the Sudan expedition. It appeared that a British force as large as that to be sent to the Black Country should be commanded by a Lieutenant-General. Lord Salisbury—and public opinion—had determined that Sir Herbert Kitchener should not be superseded as Commander-in-Chief of the Anglo-Egyptian army. But he was not a Lieutenant-General in Her Majesty's service and did not rank as such. Tradition stood in the way of his taking command. It finally gave way to Lord Cromer's insistence. His point was that the Sirdar should be made Commander-in-Chief and that Major-General Gatacre should command the English Division with a Brigadier in charge of each of the brigades. This was what was done.¹

On 27th August the Anglo-Egyptian army, consisting of 8,200 British and 17,600 Egyptian and Sudanese soldiers,² was concentrated on the left bank of the Nile at Royan at the head of the Sixth Cataract or, on a straight line, some 35 miles from Omdurman. This expeditionary force which was thus massed for the culminating moment of the River War consisted of:—

Commander-in-Chief, The Sirdar

The British Division

Major-General Gatacre Commanding

21st Lancers ;

32nd Field and 37th Howitzer Batteries, R.A. ;

1st Brigade (1st Warwicks, Lincolns, Camerons, and Seaforths, with six Maxims, and a detachment R.E.)—Wauchope ;

2nd Brigade (1st Grenadier Guards and Northumberland Fusiliers, 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers and Rifle Brigade, with four Maxims, and a detachment R.E.)—Lyttleton.³

¹ *Ibid*, p. 230.

² These figures are given in both *Arthur's Life of Lord Kitchener*, i, 231, and in Churchill's *The River War*, p. 249. *The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*, by Gleichen, a work of equal authority, fixes the grand total of the Anglo-Egyptian army at "about 23,000".

³ *The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*, Gleichen, i, 265.

The Egyptian Division
Major-General Hunter Commanding

- 9 Squadrons Cavalry ;
- 1 Horse and 4 Field Batteries ;
- 8 Companies Camel Corps ;
- 1st Brigade (2nd Egyptian, 9th, 10th, and 11th Sudanese)
—Macdonald ;
- 2nd Brigade (8th Egyptian, 12th, 13th, and 14th
Sudanese)—Maxwell ;
- 3rd Brigade (3rd, 4th, 7th, and 15th Egyptian)—
Lewis ;
- 4th Brigade (1st, 5th, 17th, and 18th Egyptian)—
Collinson ;

besides Camel Transport, Medical Corps, O.S.C., etc. The River force consisted of a flotilla of 10 armoured gunboats, including two 40-pounder guns, besides other steamers, boats, and barges. This section was under Commander Keppel.

While the army was to move along the Omdurman side of the Nile—the west bank—a force of Arab irregulars was organized to follow along the other bank and clear it of Dervishes. These “Friendlies” totalled 2,500. Major Stuart-Wortley, one of that gallant little band which under Colonel Sir Charles Wilson had attempted to save Gordon’s life, commanded this motley force. He carried his life in his hands.

It was known that the Khalifa had collected 50,000 fighting-men and that they were concentrated at Omdurman. The Mahdi appeared to him in a dream and promised him that countless angelic warriors would charge the Unbelievers and that the enemies of Allah would perish and their bones whiten the broad plain. The Faithful viewed with complacency the massing of Kitchener’s forces. They felt that it was a case of the more the merrier. They became so obsessed with the idea that it had been decreed that the Kerreri plains had been chosen as the scene of the slaughter of the “Turks”, that they blindly evacuated the head of

the Shabluka river gorge and thus greatly facilitated the task of the Sirdar.

So great was the surprise of the leaders of the Anglo-Egyptian army at the Ansar abandonment of this strategic position, that stories began to circulate that the Khalifa had precipitately retreated to the south with all his troops. But early on 1st September Kitchener's cavalry saw in the plains beyond the Kerreri hills a long dark line dotted with flags and horsemen. As the cavalry went forward to reconnoitre they perceived that a solid mass of foemen blocked their passage. It was the Khalifa's main army, drawn up in seven divisions, with Abdullah himself and a large reserve bringing up the rear.

It was then about an hour before noon. Shortly afterwards the Sirdar rode out to survey the field. He estimated the force arrayed against him at 35,000. His gunboats were then abreast of Omdurman. They belched forth their fire upon the town and the Dervish forts. A howitzer battery landed on the eastern bank and played a part in breaking down the great wall of Omdurman. The "Friendlies", operating opposite the town and on Tuti island, attacked the neighbouring villages and remaining forts.

By one o'clock the main Anglo-Egyptian army had reached a hamlet known as Egeiga, in the immediate vicinity of Omdurman, and it looked for a moment as if the Dervishes were about to charge. But they thought the matter over and delayed. Afternoon became evening, evening night, and nothing happened. By morning the Sirdar had his defences in shape to resist any attack that the Ansars were capable of launching. His line measured 3,000 yards. In the gaps between the various units were placed little field-guns and Maxims.

At six o'clock on the morning of 2nd September, the first of the Dervish formations came under artillery fire. Then the Grenadiers opened up at a distance of 2,700 yards. Other battalions gradually took up the firing. Osman Azrak's followers were mowed down by a hail of bullets and shells. But they were brave men.

They looked death in the face and never faltered. "Where a hundred fell a hundred more jostled each other to take their places ; with fine courage and fierce curses the surging mob headed straight for the lines of death-dealing rifles and, reckless of losses, did not draw breath till they were within 300 yards of the Sudanese brigades. There and then they faded away. Masses, torn to pieces by the terrible fire, became groups ; groups became driftlets ; driftlets became single men who ran, flung up their arms, and dropped. In forty minutes from the opening of the assault over 2,000, including Osman himself, were killed, and twice that number of his brave warriors were wounded. The remainder concealed themselves as best they could in the folds of the ground and fired fitfully on." ¹

This fighting was typical of the bravery shown by the Ansars in every phase of the battle. They fought like lions, but were as helpless as those beasts in the face of musketry fired from cover. The Khalifa, after a vain attempt at rallying his men to the defence of the city, made good his escape. He fled to Kordofan where he joined the garrison at El Obeid.

By 11.30 in the morning the real fighting was a thing of the past. At 2.30 in the afternoon, with the Sirdar riding at their head and Maxwell's Black brigade leading, the Anglo-Egyptian army moved on towards "the maze of filthy huts which formed the northern quarter" of Omdurman. Pushing on, Kitchener and his staff arrived opposite the Mahdi's tomb. There, in the hour of victory, death came within an ace of claiming him. Four shells of his own guns, through some misunderstanding, were fired on the Mahdi's tomb and burst within a few yards of the Headquarters staff.²

Dervish corpses to the number of 10,563 were counted on the field and elsewhere during the next few days. At least as many more Ansars were wounded. About 5,000 prisoners remained in the hands of the victorious army. The Anglo-Egyptian losses were : Killed, British officers 3, British non-commissioned officers and

¹ Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, 237.

² *Ibid.*, p. 242.

men 25, native non-commissioned officers and men 20 ; wounded, British officers 17, British non-commissioned officers and men 136, native non-commissioned officers and men 261.¹

Before ten o'clock the Sirdar, having drafted his telegram announcing the results of the engagement, left his staff to fill in the details, stretched himself on a camp-bed, and was soon fast asleep. Through all the crucial moments of the day his imperturbability had not been ruffled. "His calmness in directing the intricate manœuvres which finally drove the Khalifa off the field was of a piece with his seemingly stony composure as he rode at the head of his troops through the captured city. Stern, upright, and unsmiling he passed through the crowded streets of the town which for years had been the goal of all his efforts ; and even at the evening meal with his personal staff the set features displayed no unusual feelings, and hardly a word betrayed the intense inward glow which the day's doings must have induced."

Charles de Freycinet, one of the outstanding French statesmen of the latter quarter of the nineteenth century, accuses this impassible English gentleman of wanton cruelty. The Gaul confused self-restraint with callousness. He writes thus of the battle of Omdurman :—

"Kitchener reached the outskirts of Omdurman on 1st September. On the morrow a decisive battle was fought, during which not only the soldiers of the Khalifa but a multitude without means of defence were exterminated. It is preferable to throw a veil over that terrible day. It is difficult to appreciate all its circumstances. The glory of the Commanding General would certainly have been greater if a little more humanity had been shown by him. Why that scene of the profanation of the tomb of the Prophet ? Why that mutilated skeleton thrown into the Nile ? Such acts, which one would fain attribute to subordinates, do not

¹ Ibid., p. 243. The figures given in *The River War*, p. 310, and in *Modern Egypt*, II, 105, differ somewhat from those mentioned in the text, but are in substantial agreement with them.

add to the prestige of their authors and leave behind them imperishable hatreds.”¹

Charles de Freycinet lived to be a very old man and was, during the Great War, a Minister of France when Kitchener was presiding over the British War Office. The French Huguenot probably then regretted the attack which he had made upon his great Protestant ally. Had he taken the trouble, some thirty years earlier, to have looked the facts in the face, he would have found that Kitchener had done nothing at the battle of Omdurman, or during the following days, which was unworthy of the best traditions of civilized warfare. It is perfectly possible that men who were defenceless may, in isolated cases, have been killed, but here is what an eye-witness wrote of conditions with which the Anglo-Egyptian army was confronted :—

“The barbarous usage of killing the wounded has become traditional in Sudanese warfare and in some cases it must be looked upon as a painful necessity. The wounded Dervishes—as I saw with my own eyes and, on one occasion, nearly felt with my own body—sometimes raised themselves and fired one last round at our advancing line. On one occasion a wounded Baggara suddenly rose up from a little heap of bodies and stabbed no less than seven Egyptian cavalry troopers before he was finally dispatched.”²

Kitchener's own words explain all about what de Freycinet calls the profanation of the Mahdi's tomb. The Sirdar wrote Lord Salisbury :—

“After the battle of Omdurman I thought it was politically advisable, considering the state of the country, that the Mahdi's tomb, which was the centre of pilgrimage and fanatical feeling, should be destroyed ; the tomb was also in a dangerous condition owing to the damage done to it by shell-fire and might have caused loss of life if left as it was. When I left Omdurman for Fashoda, I ordered its destruction. This was done

¹ *La Question d'Egypte*, par C. de Freycinet, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, p. 410.

² *The Downfall of the Dervishes*, by Ernest N. Bennett, London, Methuen & Co. (1898), p. 183.

in my absence, the Mahdi's bones being thrown into the Nile. The skull only was preserved¹ and handed over to me for disposal. No other bones were kept and there was no coffin. I was advised, after the taking of Omdurman, by Muhammadan officers, that it would be better to have the body removed, as otherwise many of the more ignorant people of Kordofan would consider that the sanctity with which they surrounded the Mahdi prevented us from doing so."²

The man whose political sense caused him to desecrate the tomb of the Mahdi thought of Gordon. On the morrow of the Sirdar's victory the army cleared out of Omdurman and the British force was ordered to Khartum. On the ruins of the old palace the British and Egyptian flags were hoisted together and a solemn memorial service held for the hero who in 1885 had died in defence of civilization.

"And here," writes Sir George Arthur, "at last pent-up feelings found expression; for when Father Brindle, the veteran and beloved chaplain who had accompanied the Gordon Relief Expedition, offered the prayer he had composed for this occasion, the tears rolled up in Kitchener's eyes and coursed unrestrained down his cheeks; and when the simple ceremony was over, and his officers waited for his word to dismiss the parade, he was too overcome to speak, and merely signed to General Hunter to give the necessary word of command."

Before Kitchener had regained his wonted equanimity a messenger rushed in with a telegram. It had been brought over in haste by a boat. It said that Her Majesty the Queen was pleased to express her deep appreciation of the victory by conferring on the Sirdar a peerage as a reward for his brilliant services. "Ouf, it is all over," he remarked somewhat later, "and I feel like a rag—but am very very thankful there was no hitch. The Queen offered me a peerage in such a nice manner. I think 'Khartoum of Aspall' will be the title I choose.

¹ The skull of the Mahdi was buried at Wady Halfa—Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, 260, note.

² Arthur, *op. cit.*, i, p. 260.

'Kitchener' is too horrible a name to put a 'Lord' in front of it."¹ Mature reflection taught him, however, that it was as Kitchener that he had won his fame and that that was the name by which posterity would sing his praise. He, therefore, elected to become "Baron Kitchener of Khartoum in Africa and of Aspull in the County of Suffolk".

It has already been said that the Khalifa escaped from the field of Omdurman. For more than a year he wandered about the almost inaccessible wilds of Kordofan at the head of a considerable force. At length he approached near enough to the river to seal his doom. It was reserved for Sir Reginald Wingate, who had done such splendid work as the head of the Intelligence Service of the Egyptian army, to defeat Abdullah. By a series of rapid and skilful marches the Englishman in the Khedivial uniform surprised the Ansar camp on 24th November, 1899. The Khalifa and all his principal surviving emirs were killed in the battle which ensued.

Kitchener had not been idle while the Khalifa was making his way to El Obeid. On 7th September, just five days after his victory at Omdurman, definite word reached the Sirdar that 8 white officers and 80 foreign black soldiers were at Fashoda and that they had driven off the steamers sent by the Khalifa to attack them. Kitchener caught at once the significance of this news. He knew that it meant that his mission to the Sudan was entering another phase. He accordingly proceeded upstream on 10th September with 100 Cameron Highlanders, two battalions of Sudanese, and a battery of artillery. On 18th September he reached the neighbourhood of Fashoda and at once wrote to the "Chief of the European Expedition" informing that officer of his victory of Omdurman and of his approaching arrival at Fashoda. The reply came the next morning. It bore the signature of Major Marchand. It is a model of draftsmanship. In it the Frenchman congratulated the Briton upon his victory over "the savage fanaticism of the partisans of the Mahdi".

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

Two years had passed since Marchand and his men had left the Atlantic coast. "For four months they had been absolutely lost from human ken. They had fought with savages ; they had struggled with fever ; they had climbed mountains and pierced the most gloomy forests. Five days and five nights they had stood up to their necks in swamp and water. A fifth of their number had perished ; yet at last they had carried out their mission and, arriving at Fashoda on the 10th July, had planted the tricolour upon the Upper Nile."¹

Kitchener, himself a man, knew a man when he saw one. He recognized in Marchand a hero whose achievement made the whole world his debtor. When, therefore, the two soldiers met the next day on board the *Dal* they shook hands warmly. "I congratulate you," said the Sirdar, "on all you have accomplished." "No," replied the Frenchman, pointing to his troops, "it is not I, but these soldiers who have done it." And Kitchener, telling the story afterwards, remarked, "Then I knew that he was a gentleman."²

Good manners and mutual respect, we might almost say spontaneous friendship, kept Kitchener and Marchand from drawing their swords. Each of them had peremptory orders which left him no discretion. The Briton did his duty and protested against the presence of the French at Fashoda and against the raising of their flag. To this the Gaul could only answer that he had received instructions which made it impossible for him to retire. Things looked like a deadlock. But both officers knew that they were but pawns upon the international chess-board and that it behoved them to do nothing which might render a settlement impossible.

Kitchener met the situation by inquiring if Marchand would resist the hoisting of the Egyptian flag. The Frenchman smiled and said : "Let us be frank with one another. How can I ? You have far more men behind you than I have." The Sirdar met him in the same spirit by not attempting to pull down the tricolour of France and by contenting himself with raising the

¹ Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

² *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

Star and Crescent of Egypt—not the Union Jack¹—on an old building some 500 yards south of the French station.

Far from civilization, health, or comfort, the Marchand Mission and the Egyptian garrison lived in polite antagonism for three months. Kitchener did not remain at Fashoda during those trying ninety days. He turned over his command to Colonel Jackson, who showed tact worthy of his chief. Civilities were constantly exchanged between the forces. The British officers repaid the welcome gifts of fresh vegetables by newspapers and other conveniences. The Senegalese riflemen were smart and well-conducted soldiers, and the blacks of the Sudanese battalions soon imitated their officers in reciprocating courtesies. Colonel Jackson and Major Marchand found real pleasure in each other's company. But, notwithstanding the polite and sympathetic relations between them, the greatest vigilance was exercised by both sides and the civilities exchanged were largely of a formal nature.²

While these two officers were thus marking time in the heart of Central Africa, Lord Salisbury and M. Delcassé were hard at work endeavouring to solve a most delicate problem. The French Foreign Minister had taken time by the forelock. He knew that Marchand had with him but an insignificant force and Kitchener a powerful army. He foresaw that the paths of the two men were likely to cross. He therefore took the precaution on 8th September of advising the British Ambassador accredited to Paris that Marchand was nothing but "an emissary of civilization", that it was his (Delcassé's) wish that the British Government should "give such instructions as would prevent a collision by reserving all questions of principle for direct discussion at home".³ Lord Salisbury acceded to this request, but made it clear from the outset that, while he was willing to take the matter out of the hands of the

¹ *Fashoda: The Incident and its Diplomatic Setting*, by Morrison Beall Giffen, Chicago, the University of Chicago Press (1930), p. 11.

² Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 321.

³ Giffen, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

soldiers, he considered that Egypt had an impregnable strong case.

The French diplomatist met this claim by arguing that the Khedive had long since abandoned the Bahr el Ghazal district as well as the country adjacent to Fashoda, that the whole territory was no-man's-land, and that Marchand's prior arrival gave France a valid title. Lord Salisbury then shifted his position, or to be more accurate, added another string to his bow. "I pointed out to him," said the Prime Minister, referring to M. Delcassé, "that the Egyptian title to the banks of the Nile had certainly been rendered dormant by the military successes of the Mahdi; but that the amount of right, whatever it was, which by those events had been alienated from Egypt, had been entirely transferred to the conqueror. How much title remained in Egypt and how much was transferred to the Mahdi and the Khalifa was, of course, a question which could be practically settled only as it was settled, on the field of battle. But their controversy did not authorize a third party to consider the land as derelict. There is no ground in international law for asserting that the dispute of title between them, which had been inclined one day by military superiority in one direction and a few years later had been inclined in the other, could give any authority or title to another Power to come in and seize the disputed region as vacant or relinquished territory."¹

It lies beyond the province of the present book to pass judgment upon the arguments adduced by M. Delcassé and Lord Salisbury. Suffice it to say that M. Hanotaux, M. Delcassé's predecessor at the Quai d'Orsay, and the man who really created the "incident Fashoda", tersely summarized the situation when he wrote that : "*le négociateur français veut convaincre, tandis que le négociateur anglais se contente de vaincre.*" This means that the French statesman sought to convince Lord Salisbury, and failed to do so; whereas the British diplomatist sought to win his case, and did so.

It was through his handling of the Fashoda problem

¹ Ibid., p. 61.

that Théophile Delcassé really won his spurs. He did not carry his point, but everybody knew, both in France and in England, that he had inherited the question and had not created it. He was admired for his moral courage in not going out of office during the height of the discussion when the Brisson Cabinet fell on 26th October. He was determined that France and England should not go to war. He prepared the ground at Fashoda for that *Entente Cordiale* which subsequently made allies of Englishmen and Frenchmen and enabled them to crush Germany.

Looking back across the span of years we feel that, prominent as may have been M. Delcassé's share in that diplomatic triumph which brought London and Paris together, Kitchener and Marchand, by their tact, common sense, and patriotism may well claim an outstanding part in that great achievement. Had either of them made the slightest mistake as they faced one another in Central Africa, a shot would have been fired which would probably have meant a European war, with Germany the real victor. In a word, Kitchener's diplomacy did as much for England in 1898 as his army did for her in 1914.

Marchand retired from Fashoda on 11th December. This ended, for all practical purposes, the winning of the Sudan, for, as has already been mentioned, Wingate kept on the Khalifa's traces and eventually disposed of that leader. "The financial success," says Lord Cromer, "was no less remarkable than the military. The total cost of the campaigns of 1896-8 was £E.2,354,000, of which £E.1,200,000 was spent on railways and telegraphs and £E.155,000 on gunboats. The military expenditure, properly so called, only amounted to £E.996,000. Of the total sum of £E.2,354,000, rather less than £E.800,000 was paid by the British, and the balance of £E.1,554,000 by the Egyptian Treasury."¹

Radicals in England have at times complained very bitterly that these £E.800,000 have never been

¹ Cromer, *op. cit.*, ii, 105.

reimbursed by Egypt. But the Conservatives have invariably retorted that they paid out less than a million pounds in regaining what their predecessors had spent nine millions in losing.¹ Neither political party then knew that some years later this British contribution would play a part in England's claim to the maintenance of what is known as the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, but which Egypt would like to call the "Egyptian Sudan".

¹ Giffen, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CONDOMINIUM

THE conquest of the Sudan did not mean that that land reverted wholly to Egyptian rule. Egypt is what is technically known as a capitulatory country. This means that it is held in the meshes of all the thousand and one abuses connected with consular power in the Near East. In the Levant foreigners are petty despots. They carry their own laws with them. They enjoy immunity from all taxes except those which their Governments permit Egypt to apply to them.

Capitulations were anathema to Lord Cromer. He never ceased thundering against them. He looked upon them as an incubus which made his rule doubly difficult. He considered that they were an anachronism, a survival of the past, and ethically indefensible. He was determined that the redemption of the Sudan from the thralldom of the Khalifa should not mean an extension of the tyranny of the Capitulations.

The great Proconsul was also face to face with Turkey's pretensions. Muhammad Ali conquered the Sudan as a subject of the Sultan. The initiative, the ability, and the man-power which in the eighteen-nineties carried the Star and Crescent to Central Africa were English and Egyptian. The legal effect of such Anglo-Egyptian co-operation was, nevertheless, to add new provinces to the Ottoman domains.

It was not until 13th February, 1841, that the Sultan of Constantinople made the Pashalik of Egypt hereditary in the family of Muhammad Ali. The Black Country had been subjugated at an earlier date. A second *firman*, dated the same day, conferred the government of the Sudan upon Muhammad Ali for his lifetime only. Subsequent *firman*s included the Sudan in the hereditary dominions of the Khedivial dynasty, but the Sublime

Porte did not cease to assert the sovereignty of the Sultan over the entire Nile Valley, Egypt as well as the Black Country.¹

The legal aspects of this Turkish suzerainty were not changed by the evacuation of the lower stretches of the Nile in 1884-5. The reconquest of the Sudan by the Anglo-Egyptian forces did not modify the juridical phase of the question.

Egypt was, in international law, a ward of Turkey, but in 1882 became, in reality, a pupil of England. And moreover, Ottoman sovereignty over the Sudan had never been more than nominal, in as much as Muhammad Ali had, *de facto*, made his Pashalik independent of Constantinople long before the Black Country was conquered. Turkey had contributed nothing to the original conquest of the country. It had had no share in its recovery. Lord Cromer, therefore, decided that not only would he not permit the Capitulations to apply to the Sudan, but that he would not allow the Sultan to have even a technical or theoretical voice in the government of the land.

The master mind which ruled Egypt considered, however, that England should have something to say in regard to the administration of the recovered territory. Britain had participated in the regaining of the Sudan. Her first contribution had been the financial and governmental reconstruction of Egypt, without which the Khedivial forces could not have undertaken the task of attacking the Khalifa. England had remade the Egyptian army. British officers had worked out the strategy of the reorganized battalions and had led them in their campaign against barbarism. English units had formed the mainstay of the invading troops and had suffered the heaviest casualties.² British gold had paid approximately one-third of the cost of the expedition. And England had found the necessary cash when the veto placed by the Mixed

¹ *Survey of International Affairs, 1925*, by Arnold J. Toynbee, London, Oxford University Press, i, 237.

² *Op. cit.*, i, 230.

Tribunals upon the expenditure of the reserve funds of the Egyptian treasury had threatened to make the conquest impossible.

Lord Cromer saw, on the other hand, that Cairo had advanced two-thirds of the total costs of the campaign. He recognized the fact that the Khedive had furnished the greater part of the man-power, in numbers. He knew that Egypt furnished the historical title which facilitated the refutation of France's pretensions to Fashoda. He therefore determined to work out a plan which would do away with the Capitulations, ignore Turkey, and recognize the special claims of both England and Egypt.

He evolved what is known as the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium. It is a masterpiece of draftsmanship. It ranks high among state papers. It is a model of tact, a palladium of common sense, and withal a mask. It is the ark of the covenant of law and order in the Sudan. It is dated 19th January, 1899. It is entitled "Agreement between Her Britannic Majesty's Government and the Government of His Highness the Khedive relative to the future administration of the Sudan". Its opening paragraphs read :—

"Whereas certain provinces in the Sudan, which were in rebellion against the authority of His Highness the Khedive, have now been reconquered by the joint military and financial efforts of Her Britannic Majesty's Government and the Government of his Highness the Khedive;

"And whereas it has become necessary to decide upon a system for the administration of and for the making of laws for the said reconquered provinces. . . .

"And whereas it is desired to give effect to the claims which have accrued to Her Britannic Majesty's Government by right of conquest, to share in the present settlement and future working and development of the said system of administration and legislation."¹

The Agreement is quite short. It contains but twelve articles. The first section defines the territorial

¹ *The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*, ed. Gleichen, i, 283.

limits of the Sudan. Other paragraphs provide that : (1) The British and Egyptian flags are to be used together throughout the Sudan ; (2) the supreme military and civil command is vested in the Governor-General, whose appointment is made by Khedivial decree on the recommendation of the British Government and who is removable only by Khedivial decree on the recommendation of the British Government ; (3) full legislative power is vested in the Governor-General, and, unless promulgated by him, no Egyptian legislation applies to the Sudan ; (4) Alien residents do not enjoy special privileges ; (5) no import duties affect goods entering the Sudan from Egypt ; (6) without the previous consent of the British Government no consular officers may be accredited to the Sudan ; (7) Slavery is abolished; and (8) both Governments agree that " special attention shall be paid to the enforcement of the Brussels Act of 2nd July, 1890, in respect of the import, sale, and manufacture of fire-arms and their munitions, and distilled or spirituous liquors."

Under the condominium born of this agreement, the Sudan has been governed by a despotism as absolute as that of Russia or Turkey, though far more enlightened.¹ As a matter of fact, it may be doubted whether any civil service in the history of the world has ever attained that degree of real merit, efficiency, and usefulness which has characterized the bureaucracy of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan from the date of its birth until the present moment. The small but picked body of Englishmen who gave the new administration its character appear to have been able to impress their ideals and their standards upon those associated with them, whether Egyptian or Sudanese. The result has been a model government.

Not only did England at the outset thus give the administration of the Sudan that admirable tone which still obtains to-day, but Great Britain maintained a British infantry battalion and a small detachment of garrison artillery at Khartum. The English taxpayer

¹ Toynbee, *op. cit.*, i, 239 ; see also Note 5 same page.

likewise advanced £200,000 per annum towards the total yearly expenditure of £1,200,000 on the joint military occupation, although £150,000 of this contribution has been set off by the annual payment of £150,000 which the Egyptian Government made and makes towards the cost of British garrisons in Egypt and the Sudan.¹

Egypt, on the other hand, supplied all but the highest and the lowest public servants, England furnishing the former and the Sudanese the latter. Cairo also made up the annual deficits which arose in the budget of the Sudan from 1889 to 1912. This outlay amounted to £5,353,215. And from 1899 to 1924, that is to say from the inception of the Condominium until the compulsory evacuation of the Egyptian units, Egypt contributed another annuity of £1,000,000 towards the joint military outlay of the two parties to the partnership. In addition, the Khedivial authorities advanced for capital expenditure on such public works as railway building or the construction of Port Sudan some £4,378,000.²

What England has done for the Sudan is so obvious that Britain's contribution to the rehabilitation of the Black Country requires no emphasis. We feel justified, however, in the interest of fundamental fairness, in stressing the important part played by the junior partner in the joint enterprise. Human nature is the same all over the world. When two men, one great and the other small, are associated together in a common undertaking, we see the brilliant achievement of the outstanding genius and we are tempted to overlook the effaced participation of the less prominent fellow-worker. It is, accordingly, not out of place to quote what Lord Curzon said in the House of Lords on 25th June, 1924, when the distinguished Marquess was speaking with the responsibility of a member of His Majesty's Government.

• His words were :—

“ The Sudan would be bankrupt at this moment if it were not for the financial expenditure undertaken by

¹ Dicey, *op. cit.*, p. 503.

² Toynbee, *op. cit.*, i, 240.

Egypt. If you go to the point of saying that Egypt has no connection with the Sudan at all except that of water, and you eliminate Egypt from any voice or share in the administration at all, the Sudan would be quite unable, in the existing conditions, to pay its own way."¹

When Lord Curzon spoke with such refreshing frankness the original Condominium was still in force. The unilateral declaration of 28th February, 1922, by which England abolished the British Protectorate over Egypt, had left the partnership intact. But the orientation of British policy towards the independence of Egypt modified in fact, but not in law, the relationship between the two partners.

This is but another way of saying that when Lord Cromer created the firm of "Victoria and Abbas" and turned over to it the Sudan, he visualized the maintenance of British hegemony in Egypt. He contemplated that English advisers would continue to dominate the Egyptian Government. He envisaged Englishmen in all the key positions in the Egyptian civil service. In other words, the "Abbas" whom he made the partner of his Queen was his Sovereign's ward, and the partnership one absolutely dominated by British brains.

"Self-determination" and "independence with reservations" introduced, not in law but in fact, a new element into the partnership. The "Abbas" interests had passed to Sultan Hussein, and then to Sultan Fuad. On 15th March, 1922, they became vested in King Fuad. In the meantime, Queen Victoria had been replaced by King George. The old firm no longer exists. It is now "George and Fuad". It is as different in spirit from the original entity as it is in name.

1899 is not 1934. And while King George may represent, constitutionally, the same principles as did his illustrious grandmother, King Fuad incarnates a radically different spirit from that of his nephew,

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

Khedive Abbas. Not only is the Egypt of to-day more self-conscious than was the Khedivate of the past, but her juridical status is entirely different from what it was three decades ago. In 1899 Egypt was a vassal. Her suzerain in fact was England, and in fiction Turkey. To-day, Turkey's connection with the Land of the Pharaohs has been severed. The relationship of England to the Kingdom of Egypt may be anomalous, indefinite, and indefinable, but it is certainly not that of liege, in the pristine sense of the term. It had thus come to pass that, even if the original deed of partnership had not been altered when Lord Curzon spoke in the House of Lords on 25th June, 1924, the two parties to the Condominium had then ceased to maintain the same attitude towards one another as that which had existed during Lord Cromer's days.

The political situation had already been altered—first, insensibly and undesignedly but profoundly, by a steady increase in the preponderance of the leading partner in the Condominium, as the Sudan was gradually reconstructed under British management; and then radically, by the emergence of a militant Nationalist movement in Egypt in 1919.¹

A word has already been said regarding the effect that this new Egyptian conception has had upon the internal mechanics of the Egyptian machine. It may be well to bring out at once that in 1919 an anti-British agitation started in the Sudan "which, while it did not affect the Condominium at law, made it almost unworkable in practice within less than five years".

'We cannot brush aside a statement thus made by the clear-minded Arnold J. Toynbee. He knows his subject, and writes with the dispassionate objectivity of a man who was born to be a great historian. He does not place upon the shoulders of the Egyptians the sole blame for the unfortunate current which became discernible in the Sudan in 1919. His sense of fairness caused him to perceive that Englishmen had not always shown proper tact in dealing with their junior partner. His graphic

¹ Ibid., loc. cit.

pen, after having described how the Sudan had been redeemed from barbarism and how both England and Egypt had participated in this work of redemption, recorded that :—

“ In speculating as to what would happen in the Sudan if the existing British control were withdrawn, British observers readily persuaded themselves—and they had strong ground for doing so—that Egyptian rule would revert to the previous standards, and that sooner or later, but inevitably, it would be brought to a violent end by the rising of the Sudanese, like that which terminated the first Egyptian domination in the ‘ eighteen-eighties ’. With this picture of the situation deeply impressed upon their minds, Englishmen tended to regard the well-governed and increasingly prosperous Sudan as their exclusive creation and, therefore, their exclusive affair ; to minimize the quantitatively greater (though qualitatively subordinate) contributions which Egypt had made to this achievement, to ignore the vital economic interest of Egypt in the Upper Nile Basin (an interest which was much larger than Great Britain’s) and to brush aside Egypt’s historical title.”

These words show that, just as so often happens when two partners disagree, both sides are to blame. It rarely happens that one member of the firm is entirely right and the other wholly wrong. Errors beget errors, and mistakes give birth to mistakes. Lack of tact on the part of the senior produces a want of judgment on the side of the junior. And, little by little, both co-owners get into a frame of mind which makes co-operation extremely difficult. A study of the recent history of the Nile Valley will show how these general observations apply to the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

The abolition of the British Protectorate over Egypt and the recognition of Egyptian independence “ with reservations ” caused Egyptian public men to bestir themselves to draft a constitution for their kingdom. As early as May, 1922, the former Egyptian Prime Minister, Hussein Rushdi Pasha, a man who in his

best days was a statesman of no mean ability, read to the Egyptian Drafting Commission a project for a new Anglo-Egyptian Condominium which contemplated greatly enlarging the Egyptian and materially diminishing the British control over the Sudan.

This drift of Egyptian aspirations was emphasized by two articles which the framers of the Egyptian Constitution had elaborated as early as the beginning of 1923. One of these sections provided that King Fuad should bear the title of "King of Egypt and the Sudan". The other set forth that the Constitution was not to apply to the Sudan "although it forms an integral part of the Egyptian Kingdom".¹

Lord Allenby caught the significance of these clauses. He did not wait until they had been promulgated to bring down his fist. He looked upon them as being not only opposed to the "reserved points" and as nullifying the Agreement of 19th January, 1899, but also as flying in the face of British policy. He knew that England was determined to hold on to the Sudan. Procrastination was gall to him. Patience was not his motto. "Wait and see" was not his maxim. Directness was his guiding star and decision his rule of life. He therefore, on 2nd February, 1923, when the Egyptian Drafting Commission had not yet laid its egg, gave it peremptory instructions to delete from its labours all reference to the Sudan—and to do so within twenty-four hours.

The Egyptian Prime Minister, Tewfik Nessim Pasha, who was then high in the favour of the Palace, was believed to be ready to agree provisionally, on the understanding that the final decision should be taken by the Egyptian Parliament when it assembled. Before the British Government had replied to this suggestion Tewfik Nessim Pasha resigned.

Months passed. An Egyptian Constitution was promulgated which received Lord Allenby's benediction. The first Egyptian Parliament assembled on 15th March, 1924. Saad Zaghlul Pasha, the leader of the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

Wafd, sat in it as Prime Minister. In the speech from the throne the hope was expressed that the national aspirations regarding Egypt and the Sudan would be realized through negotiations with England.

During the next months many questions were asked regarding the Sudan. Saad Zaghlul Pasha ruled Parliament with patriarchal severity. One sometimes wonders whether these interpellations were made without his assent, expressed or implied. But whether they were or were not, the intrepid leader asked, on 7th June, for a free hand to conduct his impending negotiations with Great Britain. He insisted that he needed the widest possible mandate, as "negotiations were the only means which the Egyptian Government possessed of attempting to attain its aspirations".

This declaration was interpreted in some quarters as implying that "the Father of the People" considered that Izzet Pasha, the Egyptian Minister to London, had been indiscreet when he had said, at Manchester, on 4th June, that Egypt could not renounce her rights to the Sudan because the control of the Nile was equivalent to mastery of Egypt. But if a spirit of conciliation had prompted the Wafdist leader in announcing on 7th June that "negotiations were the only means which the Egyptian Government possessed of attempting to obtain independence", he declared on 19th June that the Sudan was an indivisible part of Egypt and that the Sudanese regarded the Egyptians as brothers. And on 23rd June he went still further, and held that :—

"Egypt would not relinquish any of her rights in the Sudan and that he would open his forthcoming 'conversations' in London with a demand for the complete evacuation of the Sudan by the British."¹

There seems to be a contradiction between what Zaghlul Pasha said on 4th June and what he proclaimed on 19th June and again on 23rd June. On the face of things it looks like an intellectual somersault. It would, however, be unfair to the memory of a man who

¹ Toynbee, *op. cit.*, i, 245.

was as fearless as he was outspoken and as consistent as he was frank, to deduce from this apparent contradiction that he blew hot and cold.

An event occurred at Wady Halfa, that is to say at the frontier between Egypt and the Sudan, which may well account for the metamorphosis in the attitude of the Egyptian Prime Minister. It took place on 12th June, or, in other words, after he had made his conciliatory address and before he used his challenging language. He was but human. Highly emotional, extremely sensitive to the march of events, and never afraid to say what was uppermost in his mind at the moment when he opened his mouth to speak, it is not improbable that when he declared in the Egyptian Parliament, on 19th June, that "the Sudan is an indivisible part of Egypt and the Sudanese regard the Egyptians as brothers", the frontier incident of 12th June dominated his thoughts.

Here is what occurred on 12th June at Wady Halfa. There had been organized in Cairo, in 1922, a "National Egyptian League for the Defence of the Sudan". It claimed to represent a large number of Sudanese notables. There was also formed at Khartum what was called a "White Flag Society", which adopted as its programme the uniting of the entire Nile Valley into a single independent State. An Egyptian official in the Sudan, Abdin Abdel Salam Effendi, was affiliated with this movement. He started from Khartum with a Sudanese sympathizer to convey to King Fuad a message of loyalty which they said had been sent in the name of the people of the Sudan.

The two men travelled in disguise, and thus emphasized the surreptitious nature of their mandate. The frontier police spotted them at Wady Halfa, arrested them, and sent them back to Khartum. Two probably more or less inoffensive extremists thus won the crown of martyrdom. Their abortive attempt at reaching Cairo "aroused lively comment in the Egyptian Chamber on 19th and 23rd June," writes Toynbee. And, as the two declarations by Saad Zaghlul Pasha as to the

indivisibility of the Sudan and Egypt were made on these very days, the inference is natural that it was the arrest of these two most probably easily extinguishable firebrands that prevented Saad Zaghlul Pasha from throwing his dynamic personality and compelling leadership into the solution of the problem of the Sudan.

CHAPTER XVII

DISINTEGRATION

SPECULATION as to what "might have happened" is usually "love's labour lost". But we cannot help expressing regret that the efficiency and zeal of the Sudanese intelligence service brought about the arrest of the political emissaries who thought that they were leaders. Had they reached Cairo and shot their bolt, the harm which their loquacity might have done could hardly have been greater than has been the havoc wrought by their imprisonment. Shakespeare gave the key-note to conditions which then obtained when he wrote that—

"There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries."

But whether these lines do or do not attach too much importance to the arrest at Wady Halfa of those two insignificant trouble-makers, it is a matter of record that their incarceration provoked on 25th June a full-dress debate in the House of Lords in which Lord Grey of Fallodon and Lord Curzon of Kedleston took part and in which Lord Parmoor, speaking for the Ministry of the day, said :—

"I want to say, in absolutely definite language, that His Majesty's Government is not going to abandon the Sudan in any sense whatever. It recognizes the obligations which have been taken towards the Sudanese and it regards those obligations as of a character which this Government could not abandon without a very serious loss of prestige in all these Eastern districts."¹

This ministerial declaration had its repercussion in Egypt. Saad Zaghlul Pasha tendered his resignation to his Monarch. It was refused. The power of the

¹ Toynbee, *op. cit.*, i, 246.

Egyptian Prime Minister appeared to be greater than ever. While he was listening to the applause of his admirers, the House of Commons discussed the Sudan question. The Prime Minister, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, declared on 10th July that :—

“The position of the Sudan in relation to Egypt and ourselves has fundamentally changed on account of the independence of Egypt. . . . The position I have always taken up is, let us negotiate as quickly as possible. But I have said this : While the negotiations are pending neither Egypt nor ourselves ought to destroy the *status quo* ; that must be honourably understood.”

Accepting the invitation of the British Prime Minister, Saad Zaghlul Pasha went to London. As he stepped into the train in the Cairo railway station an Effendi sprang forward to kill him. The old gentleman was the calmest man in the throng. Nothing ever daunted him.

In due course he departed for England and began his “conversations” with Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. They led to nothing. Zaghlul did not know it, but he was the prisoner of his own words. His declarations made in the Egyptian Parliament on 19th and 23rd June held him by the throat. He did not realize the fact that his tongue had tied him hand and foot. He thought that he was a free agent. It is no reflection upon his patriotism to say that he was the slave not of his popularity but of his own conception of good faith. He felt that it was his duty to be adamant because he had burnt his boats behind him on those two fateful days when the sting of the unfortunate arrests at Wady Halfa had led him to say too much.

We do not criticize the venerable statesman for holding to his views about the Sudan. He was certainly entitled to his opinion. It is regrettable, however, that his frame of mind manœuvred the British Prime Minister into declaring that his Government would maintain their attitude at all costs. The result of the conversations was, therefore, that the only Egyptian office-holder who could “deliver the goods” provoked, as it were, the most conciliatory of English party leaders into taking a

stand from which it may, perhaps, be difficult for Conservative Cabinets to deviate. In a word, a situation has been created from which escape can only be found by the determination, tenacity, and optimism of the present sovereign of Egypt. With the past as a criterion by which to judge the future, the statement may be made that King Fuad is equal to the emergency.

Trouble in the Sudan, brewing for some time back,¹ had come to a head before Saad Zaghlul Pasha reached London. It has been said, and perhaps erroneously, that the disturbances were arranged by extremists in order to accentuate the difficulties which confronted Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and the Egyptian Prime Minister. But whether this charge was or was not well founded, it is a fact that on 9th August, Egyptian and Sudanese cadets from the Khartum Military School marched with arms through the streets of that city, and demonstrated before the prison in which a junior officer was serving a sentence of three years for sedition. The outbreak was mastered without bloodshed.

On the same day, 9th August, at the railway junction and depot of Atbara, some soldiers of an Egyptian Railway battalion in the service of the Sudan authorities mutinied and, for three successive days, destroyed Government property. Reinforcements of British troops arrived and the mutineers were induced to return to barracks, where they were surrounded by a cordon of Arab mounted rifles belonging to a Sudanese unit of the Egyptian Army. Later in the day the mutineers attempted to break the cordon. The mounted rifles fired. There were twenty casualties. No British troops were present.²

Trouble occurred at Port Sudan on 10th and 18th August, at Omdurman on the 16th, and at Khartum on the 19th and 20th. British naval and military reinforcements arrived in Egypt and the Sudan, and disorders subsided.

These various events caused the Egyptian Government to issue a *communiqué*. Elgood's *Transit of Egypt*

¹ Elgood, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

² Toynbee, *op. cit.*, i, 247.

describes it as having been "as misleading as it was inexact". It referred to the arrival of British troops in the Sudan, and while not saying specifically that the English regiments had fired, spoke of "the troops" having done so, and thus used words open to an interpretation not consistent with the facts. The Acting British High Commissioner protested against such careless draftsmanship. A few days later a junior official of the Egyptian Legation in London presented at the Foreign Office a note of protest at the action of the British Government in the Sudan.

Enough has been said to show that when Saad Zaghlul Pasha returned to Egypt on 20th October excitement was at its zenith. "His speech was provocative," writes Elgood. "He talked vain-gloriously of his failure in London, he proclaimed his intention thenceforth to act as well as to speak. Criticism of his procedure and methods Zaghlul met with insolent words. His nepotism was shameless, his selection of Egyptians for high office made with little regard to the public interest. He was on no better terms with the King than with the High Commissioner. He visited the palace, accompanied by a disorderly crowd crying 'revolution or Zaghlul'. The police looked on inactively; the Under-Secretary of State to the Ministry of the Interior had forbidden them to interfere. Tragedy drew near."

It should not be understood from this quotation that Saad Zaghlul Pasha was an incendiary. The same author says in the very next paragraph that "there is no reason to lay the outrage (the Stack assassination) at Zaghlul's door."¹ What the language cited means is that Saad Zaghlul Pasha, like Gladstone, was "inebriated with his own verbosity". The Egyptian loved applause. He addressed an Oriental audience. He used the hyperboles which the East understands. His bark was worse than his bite. He was a sentinel, faithful to his sense of duty, ever on the alert and yet very troublesome to everybody in his vicinage. But Mr. Ramsay

¹ Elgood, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

MacDonald could not permit so incessant a disturber of the peace to go on indefinitely, without giving a warning to the Egyptian Government. The British Prime Minister, accordingly, on 7th October, announced that :—

“The duty of preserving order in the Sudan rests in fact upon His Majesty’s Government and they will take every step necessary for this purpose. Since going there they have contracted heavy moral obligations by the creation of a good system of administration ; they cannot allow that to be destroyed ; they regard their responsibilities as a trust for the Sudan people ; there can be no question of their abandoning the Sudan until the work is done.

“His Majesty’s Government have no desire to disturb existing arrangements, but they must point out how intolerable is a *status quo* which enables both military and civil officials to conspire against civil order, and unless the *status quo* is accepted and loyally worked until such time as a new arrangement may be reached, the Sudan Government would fail in its duty were it to allow such conditions to continue.”¹

A few weeks after the issuance of this warning, Sir Lee Stack, the Sirdar of the Egyptian army and Governor-General of the Sudan, was assassinated near the British Residency, Cairo. On 22nd November, within an hour after his friend had been laid to rest, Lord Allenby summoned the Egyptian Government to apologize for the outrage, to discover and punish the perpetrators of the crime, to forbid demonstrations, to pay a fine of £E.500,000, to withdraw their troops from the Sudan, and to authorize the Sudan Government to irrigate, at their discretion, all land lying between the Blue and White Niles. “It was condign punishment,” writes Colonel Elgood in his authoritative *Transit of Egypt*, “and the High Commissioner had not waited for a signal from home to administer it.”²

It was said in Cairo, in those days, that Allenby had

¹ Toynbee, *op. cit.*, i, 250.

² Elgood, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

submitted the draft of the ultimatum to the London Foreign Office, saying that he would deliver it to the Egyptians immediately after the Sirdar's funeral unless instructed to the contrary, and that a long message in code reached the Residency while Lord Allenby was at the cemetery, but that it was not decoded until after the High Commissioner had had his fateful interview with Saad Zaghlul Pasha. We do not vouch for the truth of the story. It suggests, however, the Italian maxim : *Se non è vero è ben trovato*.

It may not be amiss to say that, according to the *Transit of Egypt*, the note of the High Commissioner met with less approval than Englishmen in Egypt expected. Public opinion, while agreeing on the need of punishing a guilty government, was less sure of the propriety of extending the irrigation rights of the Sudan Government in the valley of the Blue Nile.¹ No opinion is here expressed as to the justice of this criticism. Suffice it to say that the punishment meted out to Egypt on 22nd November, 1924, substantially altered the effect of the articles of partnership which had created the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium.

In the original Allenby ultimatum of 22nd November, 1924, it was directed that the Egyptian Government should—

“order within twenty-four hours the withdrawal from the Sudan of all Egyptian officers and the purely Egyptian units of the Egyptian army, with such resulting changes as shall be hereafter specified.” The requirements thus envisaged were that—

“the Egyptian officers and purely Egyptian units of the Egyptian army having been withdrawn, Sudanese units of the Egyptian army shall be converted into a Sudan defence force, owing allegiance to the Sudan Government alone and under the supreme command of the Governor-General, in whose name all commissions shall be issued.”²

The Egyptian Government rejected these demands. Lord Allenby replied that instructions were being sent

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

² Toynbee, *op. cit.*, i, 250.

to the Sudan authorities to put these orders into effect on their own account. The evacuation of the Egyptian units of the Egyptian army was started on 24th November and was completed by 5th December. The Egyptian artillery at Khartum refused to leave without a command from King Fuad. The necessary mandate was immediately sent and at once obeyed. On 27th November, two platoons of the 11th Sudanese Infantry at Khartum broke barracks. They refused to return to duty. British troops were forced to open fire on them. The mutineers answered with rifles and machine-guns. The next day, the main body of the malcontents barricaded themselves in the Army Hospital and refused to surrender. They fought to the last man and were killed. Three British officers and four other ranks lost their lives.

Notwithstanding the tenor of the Allenby ultimatum and the blood which was shed, it was not the intention of the British Government to dissolve the firm of George and Fuad. This is shown by a declaration made by the Foreign Secretary in the House of Commons on 15th December, 1924. Sir (then Mr.) Austen Chamberlain said :—

“ His Majesty’s Government have direct responsibility to the people of the Sudan. We are there as trustees. . . . When we, by agreement, admitted Egypt to condominium, we at the same time told the Sudan that never again would they go back to the domination of Egypt. . . . We have no desire to terminate the Condominium. If, as I hope and believe, the new and friendly Egyptian Government will work with us, the condominium will exist and continue, and we will recognize it and be loyal to it, but we must, after our past experience, take the powers which are necessary and without which we cannot discharge the duties for which we are liable.”

On 30th December, 1924, it was decided by the *Ulema* of the Sudan to discontinue the mention of the name of the King of Egypt in the Friday prayer and to refer instead to the “ Khalif of Islam ”. The British

Government felt that it would not oppose this decision because a *de facto* change had taken place in the relationship between Egypt and the Sudan. Mr. Ramsay MacDonald took the position, writes Toynbee, "that it depended on the future action of the Egyptians whether the *de jure* position of the Sudan under the agreement of 1899 and the declaration of 1922, which was still intact, could be maintained."¹

The friendly Egyptian Government referred to by the British Foreign Secretary in his 15th December, 1924, declaration remained in office but a comparatively short while. The march of events, in due season, brought other Cabinets into office. In July, 1929, the mantle of authority adorned the shoulders of Muhammad Mahmud Pasha. He was then in England. He had been summoned to Oxford to receive an honorary degree from his *Alma Mater*. While in London he talked—or, perhaps, listened to—politics. It is needless to inquire whether his role was that of a gay Lothario or of a *bonne partie* diligently sought by experienced match-makers. All that historical accuracy requires is that it be recorded that he and Mr. Arthur Henderson, then British Foreign Secretary, exchanged epoch-making letters.

The British note, which inaugurated the correspondence, is dated 3rd August, 1929. It reads :—

"Your Excellency,

"The accompanying proposals, together with the explanatory notes to be exchanged on matters of detail, which Your Excellency is about to submit to the Egyptian Parliament, represent the extreme limit to which I could recommend His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to go in their desire to achieve a lasting and honourable settlement of outstanding questions between Great Britain and Egypt.

"It is the earnest hope of His Majesty's Government that patriotic Egyptians without distinction of party will examine these proposals in the same friendly and conciliatory spirit which has characterized our recent conversations, and will find in them a satisfactory

¹ Ibid., p. 253.

basis for the future relations between our respective countries.

"If this should be the verdict of the newly elected Egyptian Parliament, His Majesty's Government for their part will immediately submit the proposals to Parliament with a view to the conclusion and ratification of a treaty carrying them into effect."¹

Muhammad Mahmud Pasha replied on the same day and in an identically friendly spirit. The proposals referred to in these letters are set forth in sixteen numbered paragraphs. Art. I declares that: "The Military Occupation of Egypt by the forces of His Britannic Majesty is terminated." Art. II is couched in these words :—

"An alliance is established between the High Contracting Parties in consecration of their friendship, their cordial understanding, and their good relations." The modalities of this Pact make most interesting reading. They will not be cited in full because they bear upon the relations between Great Britain and Egypt. Art. III will be singled out because it speaks of the Sudan. It says :—

"While reserving liberty to conclude new conventions in future modifying the Conventions of 1899, the High Contracting Parties agree that the status of the Sudan shall be that resulting from the said conventions.

"Accordingly, the Governor-General shall continue to exercise on the joint behalf of the High Contracting Parties the powers conferred upon him by the said conventions."

Other letters passed between the Egyptian Prime Minister and the British Foreign Secretary. In one of them Mr. Arthur Henderson said :—

"When discussing paragraph XIII of the proposals, we agreed that the question of the indebtedness of the Sudan to Egypt should now be examined with a view to a settlement on fair and equitable lines." Muhammad Mahmud Pasha replied acceding to this view. Then the Briton wrote a further note to the Egyptian saying that—

¹ The *Egyptian Gazette*, Cairo, 7th August, 1929.

"It will be convenient to place on record the agreement which we have reached as regards the methods by which international conventions are to be made applicable to the Sudan." This letter was quite specific as to details. It received an answer in which the Egyptian Prime Minister begged "to confirm the statement therein recorded of the understanding which we have reached".

All this correspondence was still-born. It found an insuperable obstacle in the final paragraph of Mr. Arthur Henderson's first letter in which insistence was laid upon ratification by the Egyptian Parliament. Muhammad Mahmud Pasha was not a Wafdist. He was a Liberal Constitutionalist who had suspended the Constitution, dissolved Parliament, and declared a benevolent dictatorship. He had accomplished a great deal during his term of office. His Nile Waters Agreement with England was an achievement of outstanding importance.

This Pact did more than take one of the great stings out of the Allenby ultimatum of 22nd November, 1924. It recognized "legal and historical rights" in favour of Egypt in respect of unappropriated water of the Nile; and did so in the teeth of a report by H. T. Cory, an American expert of unquestioned ability, which demonstrated that no such rights exist. But while Muhammad Mahmud Pasha had once been one of the chief lieutenants of Saad Zaghlul Pasha and had formed one of the original quartet of Malta political exiles, he had fallen out with his old chief and was put upon the black list of the Wafd. The result was that when the elections called for by the British note were held, the omnipotent Wafd rallied around Saad Pasha's memory and brought into power a Cabinet to whom Muhammad Mahmud Pasha's name was anathema.

The head of the Egyptian Government which received a mandate from the people was Mustafa Nahas Pasha. He went to London with an imposing delegation. The British High Commissioner was there to greet him. Foreign Office officials and English and Egyptian experts worked away at the Henderson-Mahmud-Pasha draft agreement.

Marvels of political necromancy and of diplomatic acrobatics are said to have taken place. A spirit of goodwill surmounted many obstacles. The impossible became commonplace. Squares were made into curves. The skill and confidence which thus made even pessimists smile like optimists were, however, unable to find a formula for the problem of the Sudan. The Black Country resisted the best draftsmen. One does not know officially how near the two extremes came to meeting. All that one can affirm is that even the moderates in both camps agreed to disagree.

Months have passed since Mr. Arthur Henderson and Mustafa Nahas Pasha separated. The constructive genius of the Sudan Gezira, the wizard of Friedrich, Beit & Company, Sir Frederick Eckstein, has gone to a better world : and what is more important from an economic point of view :—

(1) the production per acre of Sudan cotton has recently been very disappointing ;

(2) the price of cotton in the world markets has fallen off very materially ; and

(3) the British tax-payer's endorsement of the bond issues of the Sudan Government makes this unhappy combination of bad cotton quotations, production of inferior cotton, and unsatisfactory output per acre a matter of moment to the British Treasury.

Of course, everybody who produces the fleecy staple hopes that the days of poor prices will soon be over. Great brains are working to find a solution to the unsatisfactory cotton yield of the Gezira lands. It is hoped to improve both the quality and the quantity. The expanse is so great that appeals can still be made to virgin soil. Will this solve the problem of low yield per acre ? Can the irrigation system be extended indefinitely to keep up with such a shifting of the acreage under cultivation ? These questions are important. They show that conditions now are different from what they were in 1929. This circumstance may, perhaps, facilitate the solution of the problem of the Sudan. Who knows ?

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WATERS OF THE NILE

SHORTLY after the reconquest of the Sudan, the control of the Nile above and below Wady Halfa was placed exclusively in the hands of the Irrigation Service of the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works. There was nothing cryptic about this arrangement. It was due to the fact that Lord Cromer, whose personality dominated both Egypt and the Sudan, looked upon the Nile as Egypt's river. To him the Black Country was a viaduct which carried life-giving silt to the fertile fields of the Delta. But fair play was his predominant characteristic. He knew that the leading officials of the Egyptian Ministry were Englishmen. He therefore felt that this control would not be exploited unfairly by Egypt to the disadvantage of the Sudan.

During the years immediately following the rebirth of the Sudan, Sir William Garstin, the Under-Secretary of State for Public Works in Egypt, made a thorough survey of the Upper Nile Basin. An indirect fruit of his labours is seen in the article on the Nile in the XIIth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. His official report is a masterpiece. It discusses all the major problems then pending. So comprehensive was his study that it has blazed the way for practically all the irrigation works which were subsequently carried out in the Valley of the Nile.

When Lord Cromer had completed the analysis of the Garstin report, the creator of Modern Egypt is said to have observed that "the whole plan was based on the principle of utilizing the waters of the White Nile for the benefit of Egypt and those of the Blue Nile for that of the Sudan". This formula caught the ear of the public. It is said to have exerted an

important influence upon successive proposals and negotiations.¹

Sir William Garstin recommended in his report that a separate Sudan Branch should be organized in the Irrigation Service of the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works. The execution of irrigation projects in the Sudan was, nevertheless, allowed to remain in abeyance until the new Government should have had an opportunity to solve more pressing problems. It was felt that the intervening years could most profitably be applied to ascertaining, by experiment, the best methods of cotton cultivation under local conditions. These preliminaries, we learn from the authoritative *Survey of International Affairs*, had all been worked out by 1913. During that year, under the inspiration of Lord Kitchener, then British Diplomatic Agent and Consul-General in Egypt, the Sudan Government, in co-operation with the Sudan Plantations Syndicate, put in hand one of Sir William Garstin's projects.²

The Great War played havoc with these plans. Negotiations between the Sudan Government and the Plantations Syndicate do not appear, however, to have been entirely stopped by the titanic struggle. At all events, an agreement was signed as early as 7th October, 1919. It provided that the Government was, at its own cost, to give the Syndicate possession of the necessary lands and construct the major works required for carrying the plan into effect. The cost of the subsidiary canalization was assumed by the Syndicate.

The Sudan Plantations Syndicate is a trust, in the American sense of the term, headed by Friedrich, Beit and Co., of London. Its objects are laudable. Manchester calls for Empire-grown cotton. It was believed in 1919 that the Sudan could go a long way towards answering that demand. Egypt cannot. British financiers and British statesmen accordingly felt, and properly so, that they should make an effort towards

¹ *Survey of International Affairs, 1925*, by Arnold J. Toynbee, i, 255. (This article entitled "Allocation of the Nile Waters" is a masterly presentation of the question.)

² *Ibid.*, p. 256.

obtaining from the Sudan the cotton which the Lancashire mills require for spinning purposes.

The Senaar dam, envisaged by the plan conceived in 1913 and put into shape in 1919, was completed in 1925. It cost approximately £11,000,000 sterling. As many as 25,000 labourers a day were employed on the job. The barrage is nearly 2 miles long. Connected with it there are nearly 9,286 miles of canals in the first 300,000 acres under irrigation. The amount of water stored behind the dam is slightly under 800,000,000 tons. Some of it is below the level of the land. Some of it is wasted through evaporation. It is stated, however, that a supply of some 400,000,000 tons is available.

The cost of this construction, and the advances made to the Syndicate for certain permanent works of its own, were financed by three Sudan Government loans, issued in five instalments between October, 1919, and November, 1924.¹ The money was raised (1) under a British "Government of the Sudan Loan Act" of 1919, under which the interest on the bonds was guaranteed by the British Government; (2) under the British "Trade Facilities and Loans Guarantee Act, 1922", and (3) under the British "Trade Facilities Act, 1924". In the end the British Parliament authorized a guarantee for Sudan Government loans up to a total of £13,000,000 sterling.²

These last sixty odd words and figures should be driven home. They play, perhaps, but an incidental part in the present chapter. Their role in the subject of the allocation of the Nile waters is but a subsidiary phase of that topic. They imply, however, that the British tax-payer has a direct interest in the success or failure of the noble experiment of the Sudan Plantations Syndicate. Should it turn out that the price of cotton in the world markets or the production per acre of the Gezira lands, either or both, be disappointing, it may happen that this responsibility, assumed by the British Parliament for the payment of these interest charges and for the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

² *Ibid.*, p. 257, note.

reimbursement of the capital sum of £13,000,000 sterling, may have a direct bearing upon Anglo-Egyptian "conversations" looking towards the settlement of the Sudan question.

The gigantic undertaking thus backed by the hard cash of the British tax-payer serves what is known as the Gezira or Mesopotamia, which lies between the Blue and White Niles and forms a triangle with its base on the railway from Senaar to Kosti and its apex at Khartum. The whole area comprises 5,000,000 acres. It is estimated that 3,000,000 acres can be brought under the plough. As early as 1927, more than 3,000,000 acres were under irrigation.¹ This expanse has, since then, been materially enlarged.

- That intelligent co-operation between statesmanship and finances called for by the requirements of Manchester and the foresight of Empire-builders, adequately safeguarded the interests of the Sudan Government and of the inhabitants of the Sudan. The Syndicate, under the Government's control, was to manage, at its own cost, the letting of the lands and the cultivation by the tenants. Two-thirds of each holding were to be planted with fodder and grain crops, for the tenant's own consumption, tax free. The remaining third was to be sown with cotton. The gross profits of the cotton yield were to be divided between the tenant, the Syndicate, and the Government in the proportions of 40, 25, and 35 respectively.² The State gets this large share of the receipts because, as has already been said, it built the dam.

The Government obtained possession of the lands under an Ordinance promulgated 20th October, 1921. Under this decree the State assumed the power to rent lands compulsorily from the owners, at an annual rental of ten piastres (two shillings at par) per annum. In addition to receiving this annual sum, owners thus deprived, in principle, of the use of their lands were given the first claim to take up holdings as nearly as

¹ "The Sudan Challenges the South," by Pierre Crabitès, *Atlantic Monthly*, Boston, Mass., U.S.A., March, 1929.

² Toynbee, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

possible equivalent to their own properties in the area as redivided for irrigation. Their new tenure was that of yearly cultivating tenancies, with a right of renewal, if they complied with the specified conditions. As a matter of fact, every owner who applied was allotted a tenancy. Few owners were subsequently struck off as unsatisfactory.¹ In other words, absolute good faith presided over the execution of the entire scheme. Its object was not to expropriate the owners of land ; its purpose was to bring about an intelligent co-operation between the Government, the inhabitants, and the financiers who were advancing the money and supplying the brains. State control was deemed necessary in order to facilitate the accomplishment of the end envisaged.

The original franchise granted to the Sudan Plantations Syndicate will expire in 1939. In 1926 the concession was extended from 1939 to 1950. According to the official "Report on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of the Sudan" the following principal changes are involved in the new grant:—

1. The area of the concession is substantially increased.
2. On completion of the full additional area, the Government's share will be changed from 35 to 40 per cent of the proceeds and the Syndicate's reduced from 25 to 20 per cent.

The report adds that it is expected that "the full area" will be in cultivation by 1930. But nothing is specifically said as to what is meant by "full area", or to what extent "the area has been substantially increased" by the 1926 Agreement.² It is, therefore, extremely difficult to know whether, as these lines are written in 1933, the "full area" is or is not under the plough.

Although the Sudan Government planned the Gezira experiment, and the contracts for its execution had been not only made in its name but financed by it with funds obtained upon the credit of the British tax-payer, the control of the Nile waters in the Sudan as well as in Egypt still remained vested, in 1919, in the Irrigation Service of the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works. The Gezira

¹ Ibid., p. 257.

² "The Sudan Challenges the South," art. cit.

scheme plays no small part in a comprehensive set of proposals elaborated by the Egyptian Ministry.¹

Simultaneously with the bringing forward of this proposal to use the waters of the Blue Nile for irrigation in the Sudan, another plan was set on foot for the construction of a barrage to be built at Gabal Awlia, about 40 miles above Khartum. The site thus chosen is in Sudanese territory. The water to be stored upon it was intended, however, for use not in the Black Country but exclusively in Egypt. It need hardly be added that it was contemplated that the entire expense should be borne by the Egyptian authorities. It was proposed in the Egyptian Government's *Nile Projects* that a third dam be built at Nag Hamadi in Egypt. It was to be an exclusively Egyptian undertaking. It was also recommended that a fourth barrage be erected. Its location was to be in the neighbourhood of Makwar. It was to store water partly for Egypt and partly for the Sudan.

These recommendations of the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works were bitterly denounced by Sir William Willcocks, the designer of the Asswan dam, and by Colonel Kennedy. The Egyptian Nationalists took up the refrain. Sir Murdoch Macdonald personified the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works. Egyptians rubbed their hands with glee as they read the charges which these two distinguished British subjects levelled against an equally distinguished Scotsman. Those were the days when "Self-determination" was looked upon as a panacea for Government pains and ailments. Cairo students were perennially on strike.

This controversy between the Willcocks-Kennedy partisans and the Macdonald advocates intensified a situation pregnant with all kinds of possibilities. Lord Allenby, then British High Commissioner at Cairo, sought to clarify the atmosphere by getting this misunderstanding between English gentlemen out of the way. This is but another way of saying that on 10th January,

¹ *Nile Control*, issued by the Ministry of Public Works, Egypt : Cairo, Government Press (1920), vol. i.

1920, the Egyptian Government appointed a Commission to report upon—

- (1) the technical aspects of the Ministry's proposals,
- (2) the allocation of the increased water supply as between Egypt and the Sudan, and
- (3) the apportionment of the costs of the proposed works.

The Commission consisted of a nominee of the Indian Government (chairman), a nominee of Cambridge University, and an American expert chosen by the British Embassy at Washington. A judicial member (an English judge of the Mixed Tribunals, Judge Booth, at present Judicial Adviser to the Egyptian Government) was added to the body in an advisory capacity.

The hearings took place in an atmosphere loaded with high explosive. Had it not been for the equanimity of the Chairman, the unflinching justice of the judicial member, and the sanity of the entire Commission, the sparks which were visible on every side would have collided with the dynamite and possibly have led to a bloody revolution. But the Commission never once deviated from its allotted task. It kept its eyes riveted upon its terms of reference and its ears closed to everything that was not deemed, by its legal expert, to be pertinent evidence. Never did self-control and justice stand forth more resplendent than when the Commission, by the mere force of personality more than by the weight of authority, imposed its verdict upon the militant youth of Egypt and the extreme Nationalists.

The Commission dismissed the charges against the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works in general and against Sir Murdoch Macdonald in particular. They approved the Ministry's proposals, including the Gezira and Gabal Awlia projects. The American member presented a minority report on the several questions of allocation. The other two Commissioners declared themselves unable to suggest a precise allocation of the increased supply of water. All three delegates were in

substantial agreement that a permanent board, consisting of two members representing Egypt and the Sudan respectively, with an independent chairman, should be set up, and that all differences of opinion as to the practical mechanics of the projects should be referred to it.¹

The calm dignity of the Nile Projects Commission quieted, in a measure, the exuberance of the Egyptians who assailed the point of view of the British Adviser to the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works, but it did not put an end to what may be called their legitimate fears. Without the Nile, Egypt would be a desert. Even the most conservative, the most broad-minded, the most pro-English of Egyptians dreads the extraction of a molecule of Nile water for the benefit of the Sudan. He looks upon the Nile as his river, its silt as his property, and its irrigation possibilities as his birthright. His subconscious mind reacted against the ear-marking of any proportion of the Nile water for the Sudan.

Lord Cromer confirmed the Egyptian *fellah* in this mental attitude. He insisted that the conquest of the Sudan was essential to the very existence of the State he ruled. He feared that if the Black Country remained "no-man's-land" European nations might seize it and divert the Nile to other parts. The Anglo-Egyptian condominium, accordingly, emphasized the fact that the Nile was Egypt's river.

So jealously did Cromer adhere to this principle that when, during his term of office, the Sudan desired to use a small quantity of Nile water for experimental purposes he insisted upon the authorization of Cairo being first obtained. This permission was granted for a specific acreage. It was accorded as a favour, not as a right.²

Lord Allenby was aware of this orientation of British policy. He perceived that it had created, or at all events had not discouraged, a local frame of mind which made it extremely difficult for Egyptian friends of England

¹ Toynbee, *op. cit.*, i, 261.

² "The Sudan Challenges the South," *Atlantic Monthly*, *art. cit.*

to countenance the according to the Sudan of a right to even the smallest proportionate share of the waters of the Nile. To calm the susceptibilities of the timid, to reassure the friendly, and to disconcert the ill-disposed, Lord Allenby made, in February, 1920, a spontaneous declaration that, for the time being, the amount of land to be irrigated in the Gezira would be limited to a maximum of 300,000 acres. This assurance involved an important potential sacrifice of Sudanese interests, inasmuch as the total area capable of irrigation in the Gezira was estimated to be 3,000,000 acres.¹

But so strongly was Egyptian sentiment opposed to the general tenor of the "Nile projects" envisaged by the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works that, on 25th May, 1921, the Cairo Government decided to suspend operations on all irrigation works in the Sudan pending an agreement with Great Britain regarding the political status of the Sudan. This decision did not affect the building of the Senaar dam, because the Sudan Government was to pay for that barrage with funds made available through pledging the credit of the British tax-payer. The Egyptian authorities, nevertheless, made two reservations in respect of this Senaar Dam. The first was that the area to be irrigated by it was to be limited to 300,000 acres. The second was that "the definitive decision, on the Egyptian side, regarding these works was to be reserved until the conclusion of the impending Anglo-Egyptian negotiations".²

It is difficult to say just what such indefinite terminology really meant. But, whatever it implied, the Governor-General of the Sudan telegraphed to the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works that he proposed to carry out the Gezira Scheme. The Egyptian Government *fit toutes ses réserves*, as the French express it, but lodged no formal protest. The work went on, and nobody's equanimity was ruffled by this correspondence.

Within less than a year after the exchange of these notes, Great Britain, by a unilateral act, abolished the British Protectorate over Egypt and recognized the

¹ Toynbee, *op. cit.*, i, 262.

² *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

independence of that country "with reservations". Among the reserved points was the Sudan.

This induction of Egypt into the family of nations required that the new State be endowed with a Constitution. An Egyptian Constitution Drafting Commission was accordingly called into being. Presided over by Hussein Rushdi Pasha, it submitted on 13th May, 1922, a project for a Sudan Convention between Egypt and England. One of the proposals of this body was that the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works should be vested with complete control of the Nile waters ; that a Sudan Irrigation Service should be maintained, but with narrowly limited powers ; that the quota assigned to the Sudan should be distributed by the Egyptian Irrigation Service ; that the Gezira projects should be carried out by the same authority ; that the maximum of 300,000 acres should not be exceeded for twenty years ; and that the Sudan should draw no water whatever from the White Nile and its tributaries until Egypt had satisfied her needs and given her authorization.¹

Shortly after the submission of the Rushdi report suggestions were made both in Egypt and in England that the waters of the Nile should be placed under a permanent board of three members, one representative each of Egypt and the Sudan, under a neutral chairman. While these proposals were still in a more or less embryonic state a section of the Egyptian press criticized them because they implied that Egypt and the Sudan were separate and independent countries and that the Nile was an international river like the Danube. British statesmen, on the other hand, rejected the Egyptian point of view that, politically, the Sudan was an integral part of Egypt.

Englishmen conceded that Egypt was entitled to have a clear-cut guarantee that her water supply would not be adversely affected, but they refused to admit that the Black Country was Egyptian territory. So unanimous was English opinion on these two points that Mr. Ramsay

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

MacDonald did not hesitate to say in the House of Commons, on 10th July, 1924, with that authority which his position as Prime Minister gave him, that—

“ I give my word and the Government guarantee, and I am glad that I can also give the House of Commons guarantee after the speeches I have listened to, that we are prepared to come to an agreement with Egypt on this subject which Egypt itself will accept as satisfactory. That agreement will be carried out by a proper organization as to control and so on, and under it all the needs of Egypt will be adequately satisfied. The Egyptian cultivator may rest perfectly content that, as the result of the agreement which we are prepared to make, the independence of the Sudan will not mean that he is going to enjoy a single pint of water less than if he had it and was himself working it.”¹

Such words might, perhaps, have satisfied Egyptian opinion if the problem had been merely one of water rights. The subject, however, was not confined to such circumscribed limits. It assumed the proportions of a national issue. Egypt claimed the Sudan and refused, therefore, to be satisfied with the guarantees given by Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. And when matters thus assumed a most perplexing aspect Sir Lee Stack, the Sirdar, was assassinated on 18th November, 1924.

This brutal murder was followed, on 22nd November, 1924, by a British ultimatum addressed to Egypt which contained the following clause :—

“ His Majesty’s Government, therefore, require that the Egyptian Government shall . . . (6) notify the competent department that the Sudan Government will increase the area to be irrigated in the Gezira from 300,000 acres to an unlimited figure as need may arise.”²

This meant that from and after 22nd November, 1924, the British Government refused to admit that the Nile was Egypt’s river. Such words implied that London made the great river the Sudan’s special heritage. Such a penalty, writes the authoritative pen of Arnold J. Toynbee—

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

² *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

"was subjected to prompt and vigorous criticism in Great Britain, on the triple ground that it was irrelevant to the assassination of Sir Lee Stack, that it was an unwarrantable repudiation of a pledge, and that it was likely to alienate the mass of the Egyptian peasantry, as well as the leaders of the Egyptian nationalist movement, from Great Britain and to confirm the conviction in Egypt that there could be no adequate guarantee for Egyptian rights to Nile water without exclusive Egyptian political control over the Sudan."¹

A persistent rumour was current in Cairo in November and December, 1924, that this ultimatum had not been specifically sanctioned by Downing Street. Of course, such gossip means nothing. It is, however, a matter of record that Sir (then Mr.) Austen Chamberlain, speaking in the House of Commons on 15th December, 1924, deplored the phrasing of the demand "in quite unlimited terms" on the ground of the hurry in which the ultimatum had necessarily been drafted.²

In this same speech the Foreign Secretary said :—

"If we have a friendly Egyptian Government to deal with, who, on their side, are loyal to the conditions on which our co-operation is based, we shall invite them to join us in an inquiry as to what water is available for the Sudan after making full allowance for Egypt." A few days later correspondence passed between the British High Commissioner in Cairo and the Egyptian Prime Minister. In January, 1925, the English Resident wrote :—

"His Majesty's Government are disposed to direct the Sudan Government not to give effect to the previous instructions as regards the unlimited development of the Sudan Gezira, on the understanding that an expert Commission to be composed of a neutral Chairman, a Dutchman, Mr. J. J. Canters Cremers, an Englishman, and an Egyptian shall meet not later than 15th February for the purpose of examining and proposing a basis on which irrigation can be carried out with full

¹ *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

² *Ibid.*, p. 265.

consideration for the interests of Egypt and without detriment to her natural and historical right."

The Commission met. Its work was on the eve of completion when the Dutch chairman died. It is said that the Englishman and the Egyptian submitted in March, 1926, what is called a "unanimous report". But the Egyptian Ministry then in office was moribund. It allowed the recommendations to slumber. Its successors, and there have been many Cabinets since then, do not appear to have disturbed this repose. But Sudan irrigation has not been affected by these soporific tendencies. It seems to have progressed.

In May, 1925, the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works decided to resume work on the Gabal Awlia dam. In June of that year expenditure on both the Gabal Awlia and the Nag Hamadi barrage was approved by the Egyptian Cabinet. But in August it was announced that the credits voted in June had been withdrawn from the Budget "in order to give time for a fresh study of the whole question by the new Egyptian Minister of Public Works".¹ The matter remained more or less dormant for some four years. But the Cairo *Egyptian Gazette* of 8th March, 1932, carried a news item which announced that—

"the controversy over the construction of a dam at Gabal Awlia has received fresh impetus from a pronouncement on the subject by the eminent irrigation expert, Sir William Willcocks. The position at this moment is that a report has been drawn up and a Parliamentary Committee is studying the matter preparatory to bringing the matter before the Chamber of Deputies."

The subject came up for discussion in the Egyptian Parliament. "After a lengthy and warmly contested debate," says the *Egyptian Gazette* in its issue of 25th May, 1932, "the House divided upon the question, and those in favour of the scheme obtained a majority of 113 votes to 16, with one abstention. The result was greeted with loud applause."

In supporting the measure the Prime Minister, Ismail

¹ Ibid., p. 267.

Sidky Pasha, said that there were two points to be remembered. The first was that the project was entirely unconnected with any political motive. The second was that it was necessary to Egypt and was connected with Egypt's best interests.

While the Chamber of Deputies approved this point of view by an overwhelming majority, it is known that the *Wafd* or Zaghlulists are strongly opposed to the dam. It can be understood that many Egyptians who take no part in politics would, perhaps, have preferred to have had the construction of this engineering work postponed until the Sudan question has been settled. We do not know whether Sir William Willcocks' unrelenting tenacity of purpose and Wafdist opposition may or may not keep the Gabal Awlia dam more or less in the public eye for many months. But, as it is not the purpose of these pages to pry into the future, no opinion will be expressed on this point.

CHAPTER XIX

THE NILE WATERS AGREEMENT

THE small and real Egypt may be literally described as "the river, which is Egypt", meaning the area formed by the deposit of the silt-laden annual flood. The main part of this land is the Delta, or Lower Egypt, which is triangular in shape. Its apex is at Cairo and its base on the sea. Its extent is about 4,800,000 *feddans* or acres, of which 3,000,000 are cultivated.

In the reaches from Cairo southwards to the Sudan the river runs in a broad cleft in the North African plateau, and has deposited there wide berms of alluvial soil covering about 2,500,000 acres, of which 2,200,000 are now cultivated. The combined area of all the Nile lands of Egypt totals about 7,300,000 acres, of which 5,200,000 are at present under the plough. Of the arable lands not yet utilized 200,000 acres should be reserved for pisciculture. This, therefore, reduces to 1,900,000 acres the maximum possible increase of cultivation in Egypt.¹

Egypt to-day requires annually about 34,000 million cubic metres of water for the adequate irrigation of her crops. The experts appointed by the Egyptian Government to inquire into the "Nile Projects" agreed in putting her eventual requirements at 58,000 million cubic metres per annum. An examination of the tables published by the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works shows that in the year 1913-14 the aggregate discharge at Asswan, on the downstream side of the Dam, was but 41,000 million cubic metres.²

The same statistics bring out that in two "ordinary

¹ *Nile Control*, op. cit., i, 1.

² "Egypt, the Sudan, and the Nile," by Pierre Crabitès, *Foreign Affairs*, New York, December, 1924.

low years", 1902-3 and 1888-9, the returns were 67,000 and 68,000 respectively.

These figures show that in the exceptionally low year 1913-14 the Nile did not carry enough water to answer the eventual requirements of the "small and real Egypt". They demonstrate that "ordinary low years" like 1902-3 and 1888-9 came dangerously near to not allowing the Egyptian *fellah* enough water for the 7,300,000 acres which he hopes one day to cultivate.

Those responsible for the welfare of Egypt have long been aware of these facts. It has been evident to them for years that the greater the volume of the Nile water that could be made available for the aggregate needs of Egypt and the Sudan, the less acute would become the controversy over its allocation as between the two countries.¹ This does not mean that the political aspects of what is known as the Sudan question would be solved overnight if there were enough water in the Nile for both Egypt and the Black Country. It implies, however, that the issue would be made far less inflammable, contradictory as it may seem, if the water were taken out of it. It has, accordingly, come to pass that experts have examined the possibility of further storage higher up the two main branches of the Nile than the Gabal Awlia and the Makwar projects. Such works, however, belong to the distant future. They are in the womb of time, but are not problems which confront the statesmen of to-day.

Lord Lloyd, then British High Commissioner at Cairo, and Muhammad Mahmud Pasha, then Egyptian Prime Minister, got together in May, 1929, and sought to deal with the Nile Water problem as a living reality. They recognized the fact that the "Sudan question" still separated England and Egypt. They felt that it was insoluble as long as the water difficulty remained unsettled. But the more they pondered over the situation the more did they become convinced that "fair play" required that the *fellah's* mind be set at ease in regard to the irrigation of his land before an attempt was made to

¹ Toynbee, *op. cit.*, i, 267.

wrestle with the political aspects of the future of the Sudan.

In order to understand the point of view of Lord Lloyd, the Englishman who knew Egypt, and of Mahmud Pasha, the Egyptian who understood England, we must go back to the unilateral declaration of 28th February, 1922, by which Great Britain ended the British Protectorate over the Land of the Lotus. This epoch-making announcement has already been discussed in these pages. Suffice it to say, for the moment, that both the English and the Egyptian statesman desired to arrive at a solution of the "Sudan question" which would be just to both parties. They felt that that "free discussion and friendly accommodation" to which reference had been made in the House of Commons when the Protectorate was abolished, would be impossible as long as the water requirements of Egypt made the matter one of life and death to her and but of mere subsidiary interest to England. Both Lloyd and Mahmud thought in terms of cricket. They worked, therefore, towards wiping out all handicaps. They wanted a fair field and no favour. They sought to assure to Egypt equal rights with England, in the sense that the Egyptians would not be forced to make any concessions through fear that if they did not do so their water supply might be cut off and their land turned into a desert.

It thus came to pass that the *Egyptian Gazette* of 9th May, 1929, carried the text of an agreement on the long-debated question regarding the use of the waters of the River Nile. The accord, which recognizes, on the one hand, that the Sudan needs more water for its development, and, on the other, that Egypt has "actual and historical" rights in the Nile waters, took the shape of two letters.

The correspondence exchanged between the two statesmen is dated Cairo, 7th May, 1929. It is opened by a note written by the Egyptian Prime Minister to the British Resident. Its initial paragraph points out that a settlement of the irrigation questions which

interest both England and Egypt "cannot be deferred until such time as it may be possible for the two Governments to come to an agreement as to the status of the Sudan" but that "the present arrangements expressly reserve their full liberty on the occasion of any negotiations which may precede such an agreement".

After having thus made it clear that the Nile Waters Agreement has nothing to do with adjusting the political status of the Sudan, Muhammad Mahmud Pasha added :—

"It is realized that the development of the Sudan requires a quantity of the Nile water greater than that which has so far been utilized by the Sudan. As Your Excellency is aware, the Egyptian Government has always been anxious to encourage such development, and will, therefore, continue that policy and be willing to agree with His Majesty's Government upon such an increase in this quantity as does not infringe Egypt's natural and historical rights in the waters of the Nile, and in the requirements of agricultural extension."

The kernel of this paragraph is not the reference to the fact that "the Sudan requires a quantity of the Nile water greater than that which has so far been utilized" by that country. Its meat is found in the insistence laid upon what are called "Egypt's natural and historical rights in the waters of the Nile". Muhammad Mahmud Pasha was obviously anxious to re-establish that Egyptian monopoly which Lord Cromer had recognized and which the *fellah* looks upon as an inalienable prerogative. It is, however, somewhat difficult, as a purely legal proposition, to understand the juridical basis for the "natural and historical rights" thus stressed in this letter.

The law affecting riparian rights, as generally understood, admits of a rule known as "first in time, first in right". This principle compensates foresight and rewards enterprise. It is equitable. It finds its proper application as long as the potential water supply answers all existing needs. It recognizes vested rights. It does not, however, give a "first appropriator" a

right of pre-emption upon the "unappropriated" water supply. It does not exclude the hypothesis that all arable lands, unwatered but irrigable, belonging to different owners, including "the original appropriator", enjoy an equitable right to an adequate share of the "unappropriated" water of a stream.

All this abstract lore, boiled down to something concrete, means that by application of the principle of "first in time, first in right", Egypt had acquired, through centuries of use, a right of pre-emption upon the 34,000 million cubic metres necessary for her present requirements. But the point envisaged by the Muhammad Mahmud Pasha letter does not apply solely to this quantity. It goes further. It deals with the 58,000 million cubic metres which Egypt will need if and when all her arable lands are ready for the plough. The Egyptian Prime Minister claims for his country "a natural and historical right" to this additional supply.

The claim to a historical right to a minimum of 58,000 million cubic metres can be met by the assertion that no records now available show that Egypt has ever had 7,300,000 acres under cultivation. One is tempted to infer that the present cultivated acreage, 5,200,000 acres, surpasses any quantity hitherto irrigated. The conclusion is, therefore, forced upon the impartial mind that Egypt has no historical claim upon 58,000 million cubic metres of Nile water.

When we begin to talk of a "natural" right, we enter upon a subject surcharged with controversy. The Egyptian may claim that he has a "natural" right to all the water in the Nile and set forth this pretension in perfect good faith. The Sudanese may, on the other hand, with equal sincerity, assert that he has a "natural right" to all the water in the Nile. Both base their claims upon the fact that the stream is God's work and that it passes through their territory. One is, therefore, apt to be sceptical about assertions based upon "natural" rights. We prefer something more tangible, as, for example, legal rights.

The result of all this reasoning, therefore, may be thus summarized :—

1. The principle of “first in time, first in right” gives Egypt a legal right to a supply of 34,000 million cubic metres of Nile water ;

2. This maxim does not apply to the additional water which Egypt will require if and when she has her entire 7,200,000 acres under cultivation ;

3. Egypt does not appear to have a “historical” right to any supply greater than 34,000 million cubic metres per annum ; and

4. So-called “natural” rights are too problematical and controversial to give Egypt a right of pre-emption upon the 58,000 million cubic metres necessary for her eventual requirements.

These deductions are strengthened by the fact that the dams required for additional storage purposes cannot be built on Egyptian territory, but must be constructed in the Sudan. In other words, it is not contemplated that Egypt can obtain these 58,000 million cubic metres of water per annum unless the Black Country permit the erection of storage works in the Sudan. This means that without the consent of Khartum Cairo cannot obtain her eventual water requirements. It is, therefore, illogical to speak of the “natural or historical rights” of Egypt in respect of something which she has never had and cannot expect to obtain without the concurrence of the Sudan.

This subject of Egypt’s “natural and historical rights” to control the waters of the Nile was one of the questions examined by the “Nile Projects Commission”. The second paragraph of the terms of reference indirectly bore upon this issue. It read :—

“To report upon the propriety of the manner in which, as a result of these projects, the increased supply of available water provided by them will be allocated at each stage of development between Egypt and the Sudan.”¹

¹ *Report of the Nile Projects Commission*, printed with authority of the Egyptian Government, p. 57.

The experts failed to agree upon this point, although they were in accord as to all other matters. The two British representatives, Mr. Gebbie and Dr. Simpson, submitted a majority report; the American member, Mr. Cory, a dissenting opinion. The majority wrote thus :—

“ We regard it as indisputable that Egypt has by right of long use established a claim to a supply of water sufficient to irrigate an area equal to the largest area which has been irrigated in any single year since the Asswan dam in its present form was completed, and that Egypt has an established claim to receive this water at the particular seasons when it is required. The year in which the largest area was irrigated was 1916-17, when an area of 5,400,000 feddans (in round figures) was under cultivation.”

After having thus fixed Egypt's claim to this quantity the majority report adds :—

“ The Sudan has also acquired a right to irrigation water for a certain area : but we have not been able to obtain sufficient data to enable us to determine what this area is. It is, however, very small in comparison with Egypt's established claim.”

The text of this same report then goes on to say that—

“ We regret we are unable to decide precisely what proportion of the increased supply of available water which will be provided by the projects should be allotted to Egypt and the Sudan respectively, because it has been impossible to obtain sufficient data on which to base any reliable forecast of the probable increase of irrigation in the Sudan.”

From these predicates Messrs. Gebbie and Simpson drew the deduction that—

“ At present it is difficult to form any reliable estimate of the relative proportions required by Egypt and the Sudan of the water to be furnished by the construction of the other works contemplated in *Nile Control*, but it is recognized that when the time arrives the Sudan shall share in the waters derived from the new sources. The Sudan Government will then be called upon to

pay an equitable share of the cost of the new works proportionate to the volume of the water used.”¹

It is obvious from these words that the authors of this report refused to subscribe to the doctrine that the Nile is Egypt's river. They reject the idea that Egypt has a “natural and historical” right to all of the waters of that stream. They make it clear that, in their opinion, the Sudan has a vested right “to irrigation water for a certain area” and that Egypt has a similar privilege in regard to the supply necessary to irrigate 5,400,000 *feddans*.

The American expert declined to agree to the principles thus propounded by his colleagues. He drew up quite an elaborate counter-report. His name is almost a household word in that great Western section of the United States where irrigation is the staff of life. Irrigation problems were not new to him. He was intimately connected with the great controversies which mean so much to Southern California, Utah, and Colorado. He saw in the issue which had arisen between Egypt and the Sudan but a recurring phase of a matter with which he was well acquainted. He refused to concur in the opinion of his colleagues because he felt that their point of view departed from the principles which he held to be so sacred. He did not blame them for saying that :

“1. Egypt has by right of long use established a claim to a supply of water sufficient to irrigate an area equal to the largest area which has been irrigated in any single year since the Asswan Dam in its present form was completed” and

“2. The Sudan has also acquired a right to irrigation water for a certain area.” In other words, he did not criticize the majority report for holding that both the Sudan and Egypt had acquired a vested right to share in the “appropriated” water of the Nile. What he considered fallacious in the findings of the two British experts was that they refrained from putting on record any view as to the division of the “unappropriated” water of the Nile.

¹ *Report of the Nile Projects Commission*, p. 58.

The Cory report leaves no doubt in regard to the meaning of the term "unappropriated water". It defines these words to mean : "the water which remains in a channel or water body after all existing water rights have been satisfied."¹

It will be recalled that Messrs. Gebbie and Simpson ruled that "the Sudan shall share in the water" to be "furnished by the other works contemplated by *Nile Control*". This means that the majority report held that the Sudan was entitled to a share in the "unappropriated" water of the Nile. Mr. Cory considered that such language was vague, general, and indefinite. He went into a somewhat lengthy discussion and put his views into the shape of a final summary which reads :—

"The conclusions and recommendations are :

"1. Egyptian irrigation has practically reached its limit until conservation works are constructed outside of its boundaries.

"2. The programme outlined in *Nile Control* is the only practicable one.

"3. The present use of Nile water by Egypt, as shown in the table, should be adopted as vested rights to the natural flow.

"4. The excess water over and above such vested rights should be divided equally between Egypt and the Sudan."²

Mr. Cory supports his thesis by elaborate arguments. They will not be here reviewed. Suffice it to say that he brushed aside the hypothesis that Egypt had ear-marked the "unappropriated" waters of the Nile. He held that, on the contrary, the Sudan was entitled to 50 per cent of this "excess" water. He discarded the assumption that Egypt had a traditional or "natural and historical" right to all the waters of the Nile. And this opinion coincided with that of Messrs. Gebbie and Simpson in so far as the majority report reads that "when the time comes the Sudan shall share in the

¹ Ibid., p. 66.

² Ibid., p. 77.

waters derived" from the new works envisaged by *Nile Control*.

Notwithstanding all these facts, the British High Commissioner's reply to the letter addressed to him by the Egyptian Prime Minister on 7th May, 1929, said that—

"In conclusion, I would remind Your Excellency that His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom have already acknowledged the natural and historical rights of Egypt in the waters of the Nile. I am to state that His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom regard the safeguarding of these rights as a fundamental principle of British policy, and to convey to Your Excellency the most positive assurances that this principle and the detailed provisions of this Agreement will be observed at all times and under all conditions that may arise."¹

Lord Lloyd meant by this clear-cut language to put into the form of a contractual assurance the statement made by Mr. MacDonald in the House of Commons and already quoted in these pages to the effect that—

"The Egyptian cultivator may rest perfectly content that, as a result of the agreement which we are prepared to make, the independence of the Sudan will not mean that he is going to enjoy a single pint of water less than if he had it and was himself working it."

This implies that as a result of the Agreement born of the 7th May, 1929 letters, the Nile has become once again Egypt's river. Her ownership now applies not only to the "appropriated" waters of the stream but also to its "unappropriated" supply. The Sudan may not, at present, validly draw a pint of water from the Nile if that pint interfere, in any way, with Egypt's needs. All this works out so obviously to Egypt's advantage that the Egyptian Prime Minister, in an interview with *The Times* Cairo correspondent, said :—

"I, as an Egyptian, believe that the agreement on the waters of the Nile fully and completely safeguards

¹ *The Egyptian Gazette*, Cairo, 9th May, 1929.

Egypt's rights. Had I the slightest fear that the agreement would deprive Egypt of any right she has hitherto enjoyed or prejudice any just claim she may make in the future, I would not have signed it.

"I have consulted engineers of the highest standing, technically and otherwise, and I am convinced that the Agreement embodies the Egyptian point of view in regard to the waters of the Nile."

Muhammad Mahmud Pasha was mistaken when he said that the "agreement embodies the Egyptian point of view in regard to the waters of the Nile". When he made this statement the Egyptian Parliament had been dissolved for some months. The articulate majority of the people of Egypt were opposed to the Ministry then in power. They idolized the memory of the late Saad Zaghlul Pasha and cordially disliked the Cabinet which negotiated this most advantageous Agreement. Partisanship, therefore, created a frame of mind which begat a point of view in regard to the waters of the Nile entirely opposed to that sanctioned by the accord. It is to be feared that the Pact was attacked regardless of its faults or virtues, merely because it had Muhammad Mahmud Pasha's blessing. But whether this surmise be well founded or not, the fact stands out that had the Egyptian electorate been consulted in May, 1929, it would in all probability have followed the *Wafd* leadership and have rejected the settlement.

The attacks made upon this agreement by Muhammad Mahmud Pasha's critics are set forth in a lengthy analysis published on 18th May, 1929, by the *Balagh*. It appears from this article that the *Wafd* examined the correspondence which passed between the High Commissioner and the Egyptian Prime Minister and officially condemned the letter and spirit of the accord. The dominant part of this criticism is contained in its opening paragraph, which reads :—

"This Agreement, although it safeguards, in appearance, the right of Egypt to control the waters of the Nile, really seriously adversely affects the vested right of Egypt to control and distribute the waters of

that river and thus causes this country to lose a right which it had enjoyed without protest until 1925 and which every constitutional ministry has revendicated since that date as a right essential to the country's welfare."

The crux of the attack made by the Wafd is centred upon paragraph 4 of Muhammad Mahmud Pasha's letter of 7th May, 1929. This section says that—

"(I) The Inspector-General of the Egyptian Irrigation Service in the Sudan, his staff or any other officials whom the Ministry of Public Works may nominate, shall have the full liberty to co-operate with the Resident Engineer of the Senaar Dam in the measurement of discharges and records to satisfy the Egyptian Government that the distribution of water and the regulation of the dam are carried out in accordance with the agreement reached."

The Wafd's criticism brings out the fact that previous to the Allenby ultimatum of 1924 the control of all of the waters of the Nile was looked after by the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works and the official in charge of the Sudan zone was a subordinate of the Egyptian Ministry. The point is made by the Wafd that in 1925 the Inspector-General of the Sudan Government took over the jurisdiction of the Egyptian representative who formerly looked after the Sudan area, and that from that moment Egypt ceased to control the water activities of the Sudan authorities. The deduction drawn by the Wafd from all this is that the practical mechanics of the Muhammad-Mahmud-Lloyd agreement permits an Englishman to decide upon the water withdrawals of the Sudan and thus, in the last analysis, allows an Englishman to have the final voice in fixing what water Egypt may be vouchsafed.

The Wafd does not say that this English official would favour the Sudan, but it infers a great deal. At all events, it suggests enough to show that a powerful section of Egyptian thought attacks the agreement, which has not, as yet, been ratified by the Egyptian Parliament.

There is one thing, however, that does flow from the

Lloyd-Muhammad-Mahmud agreement. It is, that whether it does or does not go as far as the Egyptian statesman who signed it represents that it does, it at least more than counteracts the report of the "Nile Projects" Commission. Whether we take the findings submitted by the majority of that body of experts or the point of view of the dissentient American, all the Commissioners were in accord in holding that the Sudan had a right to a share in the "unappropriated" waters of the Nile. The 7th May, 1929, Pact departs from this principle and recognizes the "natural and historical rights of Egypt in the waters of the Nile". It, therefore, is an important incident in the problem of the allocation of the waters of the Nile.

CHAPTER XX

EGYPT'S CASE

THE Sudan was the stumbling-block which caused Mr. Arthur Henderson and Mustafa Nahas Pasha to agree to disagree. The Egyptian Foreign Secretary, who was his Prime Minister's constant adviser during the negotiations, was Wacyf Boutros Ghali Pasha. Not only was the latter statesman his chief's right-hand man, but he was also one of the accredited leaders of the Wafd. He was condemned to death in 1922 for an offence which martial law considered subversive of the welfare of the State. He served as Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Zaghlul Pasha Cabinet. He was and is, in a word, a man whose character, ability, and achievements make him one of the outstanding Egyptians of the day. He had in May, 1930, not only high Ministerial rank but a personal standing which lent emphasis to his opinions. His definition of Egypt's claims to the Sudan may therefore be taken as being fully representative of what may be called Egypt's case in respect of the Sudan.

It was when he was returning from London to Cairo that Wacyf Boutros Ghali Pasha put his views into concrete shape. He lingered for a few days in Paris, his second home, and spoke fully and freely to a reporter of the *Journal des Débats*. His argument is put forth in the form of an interview published on 16th May, 1930. It reads, however, more like an article than a conversation. Its language is not only measured, but the presentation of the Egyptian point of view is set forth with such a wealth of citations, such a logical sequence that if this *compte rendu* be what it claims to be, and not a prepared statement, it is one of the most brilliant journalistic feats ever put into print.

In any case Wacyf Pasha, speaking with that authority

which his intellect and his office gave him, laid down the predicate that Egypt's right to the Sudan is indisputable. After having thus boldly thrown down the gauntlet he added :—

“ to convince one of this fact one has but to look at a map. As Riaz Pasha so aptly said in a memorandum dated 9th December, 1894, addressed to Lord Cromer (then Sir Evelyn Baring) : ‘ No one will deny that the Nile is the very life of Egypt. Now, the Nile is the Sudan, and nobody can refuse to admit that the links which bind together Egypt and the Black Country are as real as those which unite body and soul. If a Power should dominate the banks of the Nile, it would have Egypt in the palm of its hand.’ ” And not satisfied with quoting the words of the late Egyptian Prime Minister, the distinguished Foreign Secretary pointed out that—

“ most Sudanese belong to a race which is of Arabic origin. They speak the same language as Egyptians. They have the same religion. Their customs are almost identical.”

Having thus struck a note which is of more than passing interest, the son of the first Christian Prime Minister known to Muslim Egypt thus presented the historical aspects of his case :—

“ The Sudan was conquered by Egypt during the reign of Muhammad Ali. The grandson of that great leader of men, Ismail, styled himself : ‘ Khedive of Egypt, Monarch of Nubia, Darfur, Kordofan and Senaar.’ The Turkish Imperial Firmans recognized the legality of these titles. Europe did not question them.” And having in this wise stressed the point that the Sultan of Constantinople, the liege lord of Egypt, and the Powers thus accepted that the Sudan was an integral part of Egypt, the Pasha spoke of those tragic years which witnessed Gordon's death and the retirement of the Egyptian army from the lands south of Wady Halfa. His exact words were :—

“ In 1885, under the pressure of events and under the pressure of the British Government, Egypt was constrained to abandon the greater part of the Sudan.

But not for long. It is a matter of record that, led by Kitchener Pasha, the Sirdar, the Egyptian army, after having exterminated the Dervishes at Omdurman, pressed on to Fashoda, where it found Major Marchand. One knows the two conflicting theses. The French contention was that of 'first occupancy.' The Egyptian argument was that all of the Sudan belonged to Egypt and that that country had never ceased, in law, to form part of the territory of Egypt."

It is thus obvious that Wacyf Pasha sought to stress two points. The first was that Egypt had never voluntarily retired from the Sudan, but that what he calls "the pressure of events" had forced her temporarily to evacuate the area south of Wady Halfa. The second was that the British Government dictated the action of Cairo when this decision was taken. He does not say so in so many words, but what he means is that, from and after 1882, English policy in Egypt was shaped by a telegram dated 4th January, 1884, addressed to Sir Evelyn Baring by Lord Granville, then Her Britannic Majesty's Foreign Secretary, which read as follows:—

"It is essential that in important questions affecting the administration and safety of Egypt, the advice of Her Majesty's Government should be followed, as long as the provisional occupation continues. Ministers and Governors must carry out this advice or forfeit their offices. The appointment of English ministers would be most objectionable, but it will no doubt be possible to find Egyptians who will execute the Khedive's orders under English advice."

This telegram was sent to the British diplomatist at the time when the Egyptian Government was much perturbed by the uprising of the Mahdi and the possibility of the garrison of Khartum and other centres being massacred. We read in Lord Cromer's *Modern Egypt* that—

"A second telegram from London reached Baring on 4th January, 1884, which supplemented the first message and read:—

"Her Majesty's Government 'do not believe it to

be possible for Egypt to defend Khartum, and whilst recommending the concentration of the Egyptian troops, they desire that those forces should be withdrawn from Khartum itself, as well as from the interior of the Sudan, and you will so inform Cherif Pasha'."

Cherif Pasha was at the time the Prime Minister of Egypt. It may be added, parenthetically, that he was the grandfather of the present Queen of Egypt. Sentimental interest, therefore, hovers round his attitude. Lord Cromer's pen can best be left to describe what use was made of the instructions which thus referred to Cherif Pasha. *Modern Egypt* tells us :—

"On communicating the views of the British Government to Cherif Pasha, I found, as I had anticipated, a strong determination to reject the policy of withdrawal from Khartum. I was therefore obliged to make use of the instructions contained in Lord Granville's confidential telegram. The result was that on 7th January, Cherif Pasha tendered his resignation to the Khedive."

After having, in this manner, referred to Cherif Pasha's attitude towards withdrawal from the Sudan, Lord Cromer added :—

"My position at this moment was one of considerable difficulty. The policy of withdrawal from the Sudan was very unpopular in Egypt. Riaz Pasha was asked to form a Ministry, but declined to accept the task. A rumour reached me that I should be told that no Ministry could be formed to carry out the policy of withdrawal from the Sudan.... The Egyptians had, I know, some inkling of what was likely to happen, as without making any official or private communication to the Ministers, I purposely allowed my intention to be known. The Khedive became alarmed at the prospect of my programme being carried into execution. He therefore decided to yield. On the night of 7th January, he sent for me and informed me that he had accepted the resignation of his Ministers and had sent for Nubar Pasha. He added that he accepted cordially the policy of abandoning the whole of the Sudan, which, on mature

reflection, he believed to be in the interests of the country." ¹

Wacyf Boutros Ghali Pasha did not go into all these details. He assumed that the intellectual *élite* which reads the *Journal des Débats* had the historical background to understand what he meant when he said that it was "under the pressure of the British Government that Egypt was constrained to abandon the Sudan". The Egyptian diplomatist, on the contrary, hurried on to quote a letter which his father wrote in 1898 when the elder Boutros Ghali Pasha was Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs. The date of the note is not given. It was addressed to Sir Evelyn Baring, who had then become Lord Cromer, and read :—

"The Government of the Khedive, as your Lordship knows, has never lost sight of the reoccupation of the provinces of the Sudan, which are the very source of the life of Egypt, and from which it only retired when compelled to do so by a superior force. The reconquest of the Sudan would lose its significance if the Valley of the Nile, for which Egypt in the past has made such great sacrifices, were not returned to her. Knowing that the question of Fashoda is, at the present moment, the subject matter of diplomatic negotiations between England and France, the Government of the Khedive instructs me to request your Lordship to intervene in its behalf with Lord Salisbury in order that the incontestable right of Egypt may be recognized and in order that all the provinces which she occupied at the time of the rebellion of Muhammad Ahmad may be restored to her."

When this letter was written Khartum was already in the hands of the Anglo-Egyptian army. The battle of Omdurman had been fought and won. The scene had been shifted to Fashoda. A French force was there. Paris claimed that the country tributary to Fashoda was "no-man's-land", and that the French, by right of conquest, had acquired a valid title. The Quai d'Orsay laid no claim to Khartum and to that part of the Sudan.

¹ Cromer, *op. cit.*, i, 383.

It was frankly admitted that the Gezira and Dongola, etc., were legally in the possession of Lord Kitchener's victorious forces. It is Wacyf Pasha's argument that to refute the French claim of "first occupancy", Downing Street put forth Egypt's title to Fashoda and made no attempt to assert that Great Britain had any claim whatsoever upon Fashoda or any other part of the Sudan.

To clinch his point the man who appears to have written an article under the guise of giving out an interview, added :—

"Kitchener himself wrote to Marchand that he had received instructions to re-establish Egyptian authority over the *Mudiria* of Fashoda and that he protested against the fact that the French flag had been raised over the dominions of His Highness the Khedive. Later Kitchener informed Marchand that : 'It is my duty to inform you that the Egyptian flag having to-day been raised at Fashoda, the Government of this country has been formally taken over by Egypt.'"

And in this same strain, the interview continues :—

"Lord Salisbury declared to the French Ambassador on 12th October, 1898, that the Valley of the Nile had belonged and still belongs to Egypt, and that obstacles to that ownership, or any attenuation of that ownership, brought about by the conquest and occupation by the Mahdi, had disappeared as a result of the victory won at Omdurman by the Anglo-Egyptian army. France accepted this point of view and Egypt, Great Britain, and France had agreed to recognize and had recognized that the Sudan had belonged to Egypt and still continued to belong to Egypt."

This presentation of Egypt's case ended, as it were, the first phase of the Pasha's argument. He then took up the events which followed the recognition of the status thus given the Sudan. He showed that Turkey figured in the picture, and that the Ottoman Empire had certain rights which had to be considered. He therefore again took up the thread of his narrative and said :—

"But it was necessary to arrange ways and means for

the government of these lands thus recovered from barbarism, without on the one hand engendering objections from Turkey or the Powers, or on the other in any way attenuating the sovereign rights of Egypt. This state of affairs brought about what is known as the Agreement of 19th January, 1899, for the Administration of the Sudan." This Pact contains a number of "whereases" (*attendus*). They read :—

"Whereas it has become necessary to decide upon a system for the administration of and for the making of laws for the said reconquered provinces " and

"Whereas it is conceived for many purposes Wady Halfa and Suakin may be more effectively administered in connection with the reconquered provinces to which they are respectively adjacent."

"The Agreement," continues the interview, "added Wady Halfa and Suakin to the recovered territory and submitted them to the new régime."

From this circumstance Wacyf Pasha draws the deduction that as Wady Halfa and Suakin had never been evacuated, the fact that they were assimilated to the reconquered provinces confirms the fact that the Anglo-Egyptian Convention of 19th January, 1899, envisaged simply and solely a question of administration and in no sense modified Egypt's sovereignty over the Sudan.

"To hold that this Pact in any way recognizes that Great Britain acquired a right of sovereignty over the Sudan," Wacyf Pasha brings out, "is not only to brush aside the letter and spirit of the Agreement, but also to run counter to fundamental ethics, equity, and the solemn declaration of British statesmen."

And, to drive home this point, the interview says that :—

"England, declared Sir Edward Grey before the British Parliament on 28th March, 1895, occupies the special position of a guardian for the defence of Egypt's interests. Not only have England's revendications been admitted by us, but they have also been admitted and loudly affirmed by the French Government."

It is obvious that the Egyptian statesman would not lose the opportunity of making use of this "guardian and ward" declaration. We read, therefore, that he said :—

"Can one conceive of a guardian helping his ward to come into possession of an estate of which the minor had been despoiled, exacting that half of the property be ceded to him? On the other hand, how can one admit that England, at the very moment when she was backing up Egypt's case against the Powers and driving it home, could negotiate with Egypt for the partition of that sovereignty?"

But oratorical questions were not the crux of Wacyf Boutros Ghali Pasha's argument. He went on to add that :—

"Lord Rosebery said, during a speech delivered at Epsom, on 12th October, 1898: 'We are about to turn over to Egypt that which, according to the French Government, constitutes an Egyptian territory.'"

Passing from what the Liberal leader declared, the interview brought out that Lord Kimberley, in the course of a banquet offered to Kitchener, said :—

"The evacuation of Fashoda does not humiliate France, because the French Government have declared that the contested territory belonged to Egypt."

"But," observed Wacyf Boutros Ghali Pasha, "why multiply citations, when Lord Cromer, the author of the Agreement, wrote :—

"'It was necessary to invent some method by which the Sudan should be, at one and the same time, Egyptian to such an extent as to satisfy equitable and political exigencies, and yet sufficiently British to prevent the administration of the country from being hampered by the burr which necessarily hung on to the skirts of Egyptian political existence.'"

The same book, *Modern Egypt*, after having said that the Sudanese campaign had been carried out in the name of the Khedive and that the Sudan should, therefore, be looked upon as Ottoman territory, adds significantly that :—

"Annexation by England, which would have cut the international knot, was precluded on grounds of equity and policy."

Passing from Lord Cromer's epoch-making book to that statesman's equally outstanding reports, the Egyptian diplomat says that Lord Cromer's report for 1901, after having declared that the Egyptian Legislative Council had voted the funds for the conquest of the Sudan because the Sudan forms an integral part of Egypt, added that—

"This opinion is substantially correct. The political regime of the Sudan is, nevertheless, regulated by the 19th January, 1899, Anglo-Egyptian Agreement. It is, however, possible that some members of the Legislative Assembly may not understand the true meaning of this Convention. I therefore take advantage of this opportunity to say that it was not worked out to affect adversely the legitimate rights of Egypt. The real end envisaged by its authors was to assure good government to the people of the Sudan and to save that country from those special complications which international prerogatives have inflicted upon Egypt."

Another and final point was stressed by Wacyf Boutros Ghali Pasha. It was brought about by the fact that some persons could not understand why, if two flags, the British and the Egyptian, flew over the Sudan, England assumed no part of the expenses of the administration of the Black Country. This subject, says the Egyptian statesman, was discussed by Lord Cromer in his 1903 report in these words :—

"The Anglo-Egyptian Agreement of 1899 . . . was elaborated with the well-defined intention of preserving the Sudan and consequently Egypt—in so far as it, Egypt, is concerned with the government of the Sudan—from those cumbersome international fetters which have added so much to England's troubles in the administration of Egypt. If it had not been for this circumstance there would have been no more reason for raising the British flag at Khartum than there would be for doing so at Asswan or Tantah."

Here is the last paragraph of this interview :—

“ These texts are sufficiently clear for no doubt to exist as to their meaning. The English people, there can be no doubt, do not know of them. The day when the Englishman learns of them he will, with his fundamental good faith, admit that Egypt's argument cannot be refuted.”

Wacyf Boutros Ghali Pasha also stresses the point, although it is not brought out in his interview, that on 26th November, 1902, and again on 14th July, 1906, the Treaty of Commerce between Egypt and France in the first instance, and between Egypt and Italy in the second, specifically refers, in article II of its annex, to “ commerce with the Sudan provinces (of Egypt).”¹

The Treaty of Commerce with England precedes the Condominium. The point, however, is made that both France and Italy recognized that Egypt had full power to extend the effect of the agreement to “ the Sudan provinces”, and that nobody, not even Lord Cromer, appears to have contested this assertion of authority.

¹ *Convention de commerce et de navigation entre l'Égypte et la France.* Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Gouvernement Égyptien. Imprimerie Nationale (1926), p. 15.

CHAPTER XXI

ENGLAND'S CASE

WACYF BOUTROS GHALI's strong presentation of Egypt's claim to the Sudan is largely an argument based upon (1) history, (2) law, and (3) the principle of self-preservation. England does not admit the correctness of the Egyptian statesman's interpretation of history. She challenges his law. She asserts that the Muhammad-Mahmud-Pasha-Lord-Lloyd Agreement of May, 1929, completely does away with any claim based upon self-preservation. And, going further, Great Britain assumes the offensive and takes the position that were she to retire from the Black Country, the Sudanese would expel the Egyptians to-morrow as they did in 1884-5.

Fair play requires that England's point of view be presented with the same emphasis as has already been laid upon the Egyptian thesis. No attempt will be made, however, to decide the issue thus presented.

It would, perhaps, be best to allow Charles George Gordon to deal with the historical aspects of the question. He sacrificed his life upon the altar of Egypt's aspirations in the Sudan. He wrote at what lawyers would call a moment not suspicious. His approach to the problem is, therefore, that of a man who was not seeking to make up a record to prove a case. He expressed his views in the seventies of the last century, long before he undertook his fateful mission to the Sudan and when no one ever thought of contesting Egypt's claim to hegemony in the Black Country. He said :—

"Egypt in her greatest days never seems to have extended permanently further south than Wady Halfa. There are certainly near Khartum some ancient ruins of the time of the Pharaohs, and at Merowa there are some pyramids ; but the occupation of these large regions was only ephemeral. To what was due this apparent

indifference to conquest on the part of Ancient Egypt? The explanation is to be found in the difficulty of access to the Sudan—the Country of the Blacks, as the word means. From Wady Halfa southwards to Hanneck—a distance of 180 miles—an utter desert extends, spreading also for miles and miles eastwards and westwards on both sides of the Nile. For the same length the river also is encumbered with ridges of rock. Any invader who should have succeeded in passing the waste tract would have found deployed against him the warlike tribes of the Sudan. Ancient Egypt might certainly have penetrated from Suakin on the Red Sea to Berber on the Nile. But her forces coming by this route would have had to cross a desert of 280 miles, and would equally have had to face the enemy at the end of their wearisome march. It was therefore this boundary of the desert that kept the warlike and independent tribes of the Sudan quite apart from the inhabitants of Egypt proper, and has made the Sudanese and the Egyptians two distinct peoples, that have not the least sympathy one with the other.”¹

Gordon was not a student ; he was a soldier. His acquaintance with history was not that of a specialist in that field of information. It was, on the contrary, that of a man of average general knowledge. In other words, what he wrote about the relations between Egypt and the Sudan expressed the point of view of the ordinary more or less well-informed English gentleman of his day. It is this fact which lends emphasis to his opinion. He may have been mistaken ; it is really foreign to the issue whether he was or not. We are not seeking to ascertain abstract scientific truth ; we are merely endeavouring to find out how England reacts to Wacyf Boutros Ghali Pasha's statement of fact.

The *Encyclopædia Britannica* supports the Gordon point of view. It is not here inferred that that publication is infallible. It has its limitations, like all human institutions. But, whether impeccable or inaccurate, it

¹ Colonel Gordon in *Central Africa, 1874–1879*, from original letters and documents edited by George Birkbeck Hill, London, de la Rue (1881), p. xxxv.

is the scientific Bible of the average Englishman, who accepts its *fiat* as fact. We read in this citadel of British erudition under the heading "Sudan" that—

"The Egyptian penetration of the country began, according to the evidence of the inscriptions, as early as the Old Empire. . . . Under the XIIth Dynasty colonies were planted and fortresses established down to the Batn-el-Hagar. During the XVIIIth Dynasty the political subjugation was completed. Some two hundred years later the priests of Amen, flying from Thebes, founded a quasi-Egyptian capital at Napata. But after that date Egypt played no part in the evolution of Ethiopia. Politically moribund, it succumbed to the attacks of its virile southern neighbours, who, having emerged from foreign tutelage, developed according to the natural laws of their own genius and environment. The history of Ethiopia, therefore, as an independent civilization may be said to date from the eighth century B.C., though future researches may be able to carry its infant origins to a remoter past."

The English man in the street is hardly interested in carrying his inquiry beyond the eighth century B.C. Twenty-six hundred years is far enough for him. And he has no difficulty in understanding the fact that, from his standpoint, conquests made so long ago cease to have any real bearing. He knows that a group of Normans came over to England in the eleventh century of the present era and that, though but a few miles separate Britain from Normandy, Englishmen are to-day as different from Normans as they are from Irishmen. The distance from Cairo to Khartum is immeasurably greater than that from Rouen to London. It is therefore easy for a Briton to follow the *Encyclopædia* when he reads in its pages that—

"In contrast with the Egyptians, a most industrious race, the Sudanese tribes, both Arab and negro, are, as a general rule, indolent."

This marked line of cleavage between the hardworking Egyptian and the lazy Sudanese makes it easy for the

average Englishman to follow the lesson taught by this same authority when it proclaims that—

“ In the Nile Valley, north of Khartum, the inhabitants are of a very mixed origin. This applies particularly to the so-called Nubians who inhabit the Dongola *Mudiria*. Elsewhere the inhabitants north of 12° N. are of mixed Arab descent. In the Nubian Desert the chief tribes are the Ababda and Bisharun. In the region south of Berber and Suakin are the Hadendoa. The Jaalin, Hassania, and Shukria inhabit the country between the Atbara and the Blue Nile ; the Hassania and Hassanat are chiefly found in the Gezira. The Kabbabiah occupy the desert north of Kordofan, which is the home of the Baggara tribes. In Darfur the inhabitants are of mixed Arab and negro blood. Of Negro Nilotic tribes there are three or four main divisions.”

All these names carry one outstanding meaning to the ordinary Briton who reads them. It is that that immense area, known as the Sudan, is, like an equal expanse in Europe, peopled by races having little in common with one another and differing from their northern neighbours, the Egyptians, certainly as much as the Slavs of the old Austrian Empire did from their German fellow-countrymen. And what tends to drive home this idea in the Englishman's head is the fact that the same article in the *Encyclopædia* which has given him so much information also tells him that—

“ The Arab tribes are all Muhammedans, credulous and singularly liable to fits of religious excitement. Most of the negro tribes are pagan, but some of them who live in the northern regions have embraced Islam.”

All England knows that Egypt is a Muslim land. All England also knows that so small a territory as Ireland seems to be irretrievably separated into two countries because religion divides the Southern Irish from the Northern. The fact, therefore, that the Sudan is not, like Egypt, a Muslim entity but a conglomeration of races and religions convinces the hard-headed Briton that, at all events, the entire Black Country has nothing fundamental in common with Egypt. And so thinking,

whether he be right or wrong, he refuses to accept the historical claims set forth so ably by Wacyf Boutros Ghali Pasha.

The English man in the street, and he is the voter whose opinion the British Cabinet cannot brush aside, makes no attempt at analysing the legal aspects of England's claim to the Sudan. His approach to that question is dominated by the cardinal fact that the Condominium began on 19th January, 1899. He considers that a title which goes back so far is unassailable. He is not interested in inquiring into what took place before that moment. He has a vague idea of what is meant by a Condominium. He looks upon it as being a kind of a working arrangement which makes the Sudan the joint property of England and Egypt. The partnership continued for practically a quarter of a century to the joint satisfaction of everybody. He knows that he is still satisfied with the basic principles of the 19th January, 1899, arrangement. He understands that the Sudanese are pleased with it. He has heard that the Egyptians have recently become dissatisfied with it. He, therefore, says that if they are discontented "let them retire, but there is no reason why I should be expelled when I am not asking for a modification of the original agreement".

This reasoning may, perhaps, be fallacious. But that is not the point. It represents the current opinion of the average Englishman. He buttresses it by such points as these :—

1. The Mahdi drove the Egyptians out of the Sudan ;
2. Egyptian soldiers, unassisted by foreigners, could not possibly have expelled the Khalifa ;
3. England reorganized the Khedivial army ;
4. British officers led the Khedivial troops and converted them into a fighting machine which was able to withstand the Dervish power ;
5. British brains put Egyptian finances in order and thus enabled the Khedivial treasury to finance the better part of the expenses of the war in the Sudan ;
6. English units actively participated in the campaign

and were deemed by the Sirdar and his associates to be essential for the success of the expedition to the Sudan ;

7. British naval officers commanded the flotilla which played an important part in the defeat of the Khalifa ;

8. British blood was shed in the defeat of Mahdiism ; and

9. If it had not been for England, France would have taken over Fashoda and the country adjacent to it.

It is possible that these points may not be well taken. Nevertheless, they express British opinion, and that is the matter now under inquiry. Those Englishmen who are interested in the legal aspects of the subject, and they represent an infinitesimal minority, refuse to admit Wacyf Boutros Ghali Pasha's contention that the rights of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium to the Sudan are based upon the Khedive's title to that country. They say that England, in the Fashoda discussions with France, frankly claimed the prerogatives of a victor.¹ They stress the fact that before Kitchener found Marchand at Fashoda, Lord Salisbury, then British Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, wrote to his Ambassador at Paris to inform M. Delcassé, the French Foreign Minister, that—

“by the military events of last week all territories which were subject to the Khalifa passed by right of conquest to the British and Egyptian Government. Her Majesty's Government do not consider that this right is open to discussion.”²

They hammer away at this same contention and cite a speech delivered by Lord Salisbury at the Guildhall in which he declared that “as the victory of Lord Wolseley had altered the British position in Egypt, so that victory of Kitchener at Omdurman had altered their position in the Sudan”. And they cite an article published in the *Liberal Magazine* (1899) in which Lord Salisbury was criticized for having said that “Great Britain held the dominions of the Khalifa by two titles, by the rights of Egypt and by the right of conquest”. And they quote Morrison Beall Giffen's admirable monograph entitled

¹ Giffen, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

² *Ibid.*, p. 60.

Fashoda : The Incident and its Diplomatic Setting, in which that distinguished American, in setting forth what he calls "the British case", says :—

"But whatever may have been the defects of a claim based on conquest, it must have had great merits in the eyes of the British Government. At a stroke it accomplished two things. In the first place, it cut through all the flimsy paper arguments. It was an appeal to the fact of 'forty thousand men' with abundant stores and arms, a railway at their backs, and a fleet of gunboats to carry them up country, as against eight Frenchmen and one hundred and twenty Senegalese at Fashoda."¹ And having thus brought the American into the controversy they again cite his words and particularly this paragraph :—

"A review of the whole British case, then, would stand somewhat like this : British claims rested in the first instance upon Egyptian rights, for which Great Britain was trustee. These rights had never been forfeited. But even if it were admitted that Egypt's rights had lapsed, then they must have been transferred to the Mahdists—unless indeed it was to be supposed that they had passed to no one in particular, an implication of the *res nullius* theory. Now, however, the Mahdists had been conquered by combined British and Egyptian forces ; and thus the old Egyptian rights had been vindicated and Great Britain had acquired fresh rights of her own."²

Passing to the last point, that the principle of self-preservation makes it imperative that Egypt should control the Sudan, British public opinion opposes the Mahmud-Pasha-Lord-Lloyd Agreement of May, 1929. This question is fully discussed under the heading "the Nile Waters Agreement". It is useless to cover the ground a second time. It may be well to repeat, however, that the English tax-payer recalls that Mr. Ramsay MacDonald said in the House of Commons on 10th July, 1924, when his position as Prime Minister lent solemnity to his words that—

"The Egyptian cultivator may rest perfectly content

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

² *Ibid.*, p. 64.

that, as the result of the agreement which we are prepared to make, the independence of the Sudan will not mean that he is going to enjoy a single pint of water less than if he had it and was himself working it.”¹

Egyptians may not accept this assurance, but Englishmen do. From the British point of view it is a guarantee to Egypt that her rights to the life-giving waters of the Nile are definitely secured, and that therefore the principle of self-preservation has nothing to do with the issue.

The various arguments which have been sketched in the foregoing paragraphs were put into the shape of an article by Mr. Arthur Merton, the well-known Cairo correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*. He published his views in the form of a paper entitled “The Sudan,” which appeared in the September, 1924, issue of the *XIXth Century & After*. He said :—

“It is absurd to suppose that without British assistance in the form of men, money, and general guidance the Egyptian Government could have reconquered the Sudan, and it is still more inconceivable that, alone and unaided, Egypt could have compelled France to abandon her claim to the Upper Nile. Egypt owes entirely to Great Britain the liberation of the Upper Nile from foreign control, the protection of her frontier, and the assurance of her water supply.”

“After the reconquest,” continues the distinguished journalist, “the first pre-occupation was the future political status of the country and the form of administration that should be set up. As Lord Cromer has put on record, it was essential that British influence should be paramount so as to avoid a repetition of the misgovernment of the past, and it was necessary to devise some method whereby the Sudan should be at one and the same time Egyptian to such an extent as to satisfy equitable and political exigencies and yet sufficiently British to avoid the baneful internationalism which prevailed in Egypt. There was, therefore, invented what has come to be known as the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, created by the agreements

¹ Toynbee, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

signed between Lord Cromer and Boutros Ghali Pasha, Egyptian Foreign Minister, on 19th January and 10th July, 1889."

And after having thus given the genesis of the present status of the Sudan, Mr. Arthur Merton adds that—

"The claim put forward by the Egyptians that the Sudan is an integral part of the Egyptian Kingdom, and that they should be given control of its administration, rests indeed on no solid foundation, and cannot be entertained for one moment. . . . Instructed Egyptian opinion realizes that all Egypt really needs is satisfaction of her water requirements and that her interests would be far better safeguarded with a continuance of the present regime south of her frontier than if she were in possession or control of that territory. . . . The maintenance of British control in the Sudan, while it is essential to the fulfilment of the trust which we have undertaken towards the people of the country, is, moreover, the finest guarantee that Egypt could possibly obtain for the security of her frontier and the permanent assurance of her water supply."

Egyptians, of course, refuse to admit this point of view. They specifically deny that "instructed Egyptian opinion realizes that all that Egypt really needs is satisfaction of her water requirements and that all her interests would be far better safeguarded with a continuance of the present regime south of her frontier". The controversy has, it is to be feared, passed beyond the stage where admissions are made. But, at all events, the words quoted express the opinion of an Englishman who is probably as well acquainted with Egyptian affairs as any man now living.

CHAPTER XXII

COTTON IS KING

WHEN Charles George Gordon was steaming from Brindisi to Port Said on his last mission to the Black Country, he wrote to Lord Granville on 22nd January, 1884, that "the Sudan is a useless possession; ever was and ever will be so. No one who has ever lived in the Sudan can escape the reflection 'what a useless possession is this land' ".¹ The opinion thus expressed by Colonel Gordon coincided with that arrived at by both Colonel Prout and Colonel Colston, two of the American officers who, in the seventies of the last century, carried out a systematic reconnaissance of the Sudan for Ismail, the Khedive of Egypt. Prout said that Darfur "is wholly unable to repay Egypt the original cost of conquest, much less the expense of military occupation". Colston, speaking of the more promising Kordofan, was equally pessimistic.

It was, therefore, not the lure of lucre that called England to the Sudan. London felt morally committed to safeguarding Egypt's frontiers and recognized that, as long as anarchy reigned in the Sudan, the maintenance of law and order in the land of the Pharaohs was imperilled. And, besides, many an Englishman considered that the death of Gordon was a stain upon Britain's escutcheon which only the capture of Khartum could obliterate. It was, therefore, a combination of governmental polity and of pride that caused England to despatch Kitchener to redeem the Sudan from barbarism. Money considerations had nothing to do with the campaign.

The years passed. Good government worked wonders in the Sudan. Egypt flourished under Lord Cromer's intelligent leadership. The Khedivial finances emerged

¹ *Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, by John Morley, ii, 394.

from bankruptcy and became more than prosperous. The construction of the Asswan dam appealed to the imagination of the world. Englishmen visualized what honest administration and irrigation could do for the entire Valley of the Nile. They had Egypt's object lesson before their eyes. But they saw that the physical conditions of that country were such that only 7,300,000 acres of arable and cultivable soil could there eventually be brought under the plough. They knew what cotton meant to the prosperity of Lancashire. They grasped the importance of having Manchester obtain an ample supply of Empire-grown raw material. Their experts told them that there was enough water in the Nile not only to answer all of Egypt's eventual requirements, but also to irrigate hundreds of thousands of acres in the Sudan Gezira. The Black Country thus ceased to be looked upon as a useless possession. The pendulum swung in the opposite direction. Hard-headed men of affairs began to see in it an El Dorado. Capital flowed into it. The British tax-payer went down into his pocket in order to make it blossom like a rose.

Kitchener of Khartoum was a dynamic personality. He was more than a soldier ; he was a Captain of Industry. In 1911 he became British Diplomatic Agent and Consul-General at Cairo. During his short reign—for the Great War called him to London in 1914—he saw to it that preliminary plans were made for irrigating the Sudan Gezira¹ with gravitation water to be obtained by constructing a barrage across the Blue Nile in the neighbourhood of Senaar. Kitchener was able to bring this work to a head because, during Cromer's days, Sir William Garstin had already elaborated its fundamental principle. The execution of the Garstin plan had to wait until a land survey and registration of ownership had been carried out, the skeleton of a railway system constructed, the annual deficit in the Sudan budget overcome, and the best methods of cotton

¹ The Sudan Gezira or Mesopotamia is that area which lies between the Blue and White Niles and forms a big triangle with its base on the railway from Sennar to Kosti and its apex at Khartum. It comprises approximately 3,000,000 acres.

cultivation under local conditions ascertained by experiments.¹

The necessary preliminary spade-work was carried through, but the execution of the scheme was delayed by the Great War. While Kitchener was still in Egypt negotiations were begun between the Sudan Government and a group of capitalists known as the Sudan Plantations Syndicate, which eventually resulted in an agreement being signed on 17th October, 1919.

Under this accord, as has already been said in these pages, the Government were, at their own cost, to give the Syndicate possession of the lands comprised in the project and to construct the works necessary for carrying the scheme into effect, except for those of subsidiary canalization. The Syndicate, under Government control, was to manage, at its own cost, the letting of the lands and the cultivation by the tenants. Two-thirds of each holding were to be planted with fodder and grain crops for the tenant's own consumption, tax-free. The remaining third was to be planted with cotton, and the gross profits of the cotton crop were to be divided between the tenant, the Syndicate, and the Government, in the proportions of 40, 25, and 35 per cent respectively.² In 1926 the concession was extended from 1939 to 1950, and the proportions changed to 40, 20, and 40.

By turning to the report which Lord Lloyd, British High Commissioner to Egypt, submitted on 31st July, 1926, to Sir Austen Chamberlain, Foreign Secretary, we learn of the importance which that statesman attached to the Gezira scheme. He wrote :—

“ The year 1925 will always be one memorable in the history of the Sudan for the completion of the Senaar Dam and the canalization of 300,000 feddans of the Gezira plain. This great work, which in July brought water by gravitation for the cultivation of areas hitherto dependent on the vagaries of rainfall, removes a formidable obstacle from the path of economic development and marks the beginning of a new era.”³

¹ Toynbee, *op. cit.*, i, 256.

² *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

³ *Sudan No. 2 (1926) Report on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of the Sudan in 1925*, London, Stationery Office (1926), p. 5.

It is not difficult to comprehend why Lord Lloyd laid such emphasis upon the significance of the completion of the Senaar Dam and the canalization of 300,000 feddans of the Gezira plain. In the success or failure of the 'Gezira project resides the future of the Sudan. The British tax-payer has backed the enterprise to the tune of £13,000,000. He is, therefore, vitally interested in the results of the scheme for which he has risked so much. If it succeed, Empire cotton is assured to Manchester. If it fail he will have to go down into his purse and face a heavy loss.

It is a simple matter to prove that the British tax-payer has a £13,000,000 interest in the Sudan Plantations Syndicate. It may be well to repeat that this money was raised (1) under a "Government of the Sudan Loan Act" of 1919, according to which the interest on the bonds issued for construction work was guaranteed by the British Government, (2) under a British "Trade Facilities and Loans Guarantee Act" of 1922, and (3) under the British "Trade Facilities Act, 1924".¹ If the Sudan Government and the Syndicate default on the payment of either the interest or the capital of these aggregate sums, the British Government must make good the loss.

It is not quite so easy to demonstrate that the entire future of the Sudan Government is linked to the outcome of the Gezira Plantations project. This conclusion is, however, driven home by an analysis of the economic structure of the Black Country.

The Sudan is essentially an agricultural country. It has practically no industries. Its mineral wealth is unknown. Its crops may be divided into two general groups: (1) Cultivated crops and (2) non-cultivated crops. The latter include the semi-wild crops which require little or no cultivation.

The Sudan produces large numbers of cattle, sheep, goats, and camels. These animals graze on the few thorn bushes and plants of the desert. The Arabs are more interested in live stock than in growing crops. They live on the milk and flesh of their goats, sheep, and camels.

¹ Toynebee, *op. cit.*, i, 257.

Most of the cattle are produced in the central and west central sections of the Sudan. The animals are of a poor type and make a very inferior quality of beef. Most of the export trade in live stock is with Egypt.

NUMBER OF CATTLE AND SHEEP EXPORTED BY YEARS, 1922-1931

| <i>Year.</i> | <i>Cattle.</i> | <i>Sheep.</i> |
|--------------|----------------|---------------|
| 1922 . . . | 16,111 | 19,376 |
| 1923 . . . | 15,836 | 36,930 |
| 1924 . . . | 12,510 | 25,713 |
| 1925 . . . | 18,735 | 29,917 |
| 1926 . . . | 16,560 | 18,918 |
| 1927 . . . | 13,808 | 14,161 |
| 1928 . . . | 11,121 | 13,808 |
| 1929 . . . | 10,412 | 15,195 |
| 1930 . . . | 9,510 | 5,773 |
| 1931 . . . | 5,347 | 919 |
| 1932 . . . | 3,472 | 4,234 |

The leading cultivated crops are dura, cotton, barley, lubia, and maize. Dura is the chief food crop of the natives. It resembles the American grain sorghum. Several varieties are very drought-resistant, and are therefore grown in districts of low rainfall. So important is dura as a food crop that the Government are very careful to see that a supply is in the country at all times.

CROPS UNDER CULTIVATION IN 1929-1930 (which may be taken as a more or less typical year) (in feddans)

| | <i>Rain Crop.</i> | <i>Artificial Irrigation.</i> | <i>Flood Irrigation.</i> | <i>Total.</i> |
|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|
| Barley . . . | — | 5,496 | 3,002 | 8,498 |
| Beans . . . | — | 3,284 | 1,068 | 4,352 |
| Cotton . . . | 70,190 | 153,420 | 79,751 | 303,361 |
| Dukhn . . . | 436,849 | 2,153 | 9,914 | 448,716 |
| Dura . . . | 1,304,186 | 87,774 | 89,958 | 1,478,918 |
| Earth-nuts . . | 77,408 | 115 | — | 77,523 |
| Lentils . . . | — | 1,408 | 3,212 | 4,620 |
| Lubia . . . | 3,405 | 60,354 | 14,600 | 78,359 |
| Lupin . . . | — | 1,335 | 3,078 | 4,413 |
| Maize . . . | 1,410 | 6,586 | 4,457 | 12,453 |
| Onions . . . | 440 | 3,378 | 300 | 4,118 |
| Simsim . . . | 192,242 | 1,531 | 350 | 194,123 |
| Sugar-cane . . | — | 8 | — | 8 |
| Wheat . . . | 1 | 22,552 | 2,015 | 24,568 |
| Miscellaneous . | 1,204 | 4,740 | 13,128 | 19,072 |
| Total . . . | 2,087,335 | 354,134 | 221,833 | 2,663,102 |

While the acreage devoted to dura far exceeds that given over to cotton, and while that allotted to dukhn is in excess of that reserved for the fleecy staple, the latter is, by far, the leading cash crop of the Sudan. Not only is cotton looked upon as a source of wealth to the native grower, but the income from it plays an important part in the budget of the country. The entire set-up of the Government is affected by the price realized by the cotton crop. In addition to the direct income there is also an indirect income such as duty on increased imports and railway receipts. In a word, "Cotton is King" in that vast area known as the Sudan.

The cotton crop is grown in five well-defined areas under three methods of watering. The rain-grown is in the southern districts, mainly in the Kordofan province. The flood-grown crops are in the Kassala and Tokar provinces east of Khartum. The third system of watering includes the lands watered by pumps north of Khartum and the Gezira area, where gravity-flow irrigation is used.

APPROXIMATE AREAS IN COTTON, 1919-1930
(in feddans)

| <i>Year.</i> | <i>Rain-grown.</i> | <i>Flood.</i> | <i>Artificial.</i> | <i>Total.</i> |
|--------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------|
| 1919 . . | 3,012 | 39,782 | 13,282 | 56,076 |
| 1920 . . | 2,055 | 42,662 | 14,308 | 59,025 |
| 1921 . . | 3,981 | 59,907 | 17,542 | 81,430 |
| 1922 . . | 3,304 | 59,911 | 24,058 | 87,273 |
| 1923 . . | 6,147 | 30,377 | 25,064 | 61,588 |
| 1924 . . | 13,524 | 58,105 | 40,037 | 111,666 |
| 1925 . . | 67,553 | 52,169 | 47,512 | 167,234 |
| 1926 . . | 47,131 | 30,453 | 106,681 | 184,265 |
| 1927 . . | 40,402 | 55,990 | 122,152 | 218,544 |
| 1928 . . | 59,929 | 71,259 | 126,826 | 258,014 |
| 1929 . . | 70,190 | 79,751 | 153,420 | 303,361 |
| 1930 . . | 71,545 | 150,795 | 197,112 | 419,452 |
| 1931 . . | 73,104 | 123,231 | 213,405 | 409,740 |
| 1932 . . | 44,344 | 56,010 | 204,930 | 305,284 |

It will have been noted that the rain-grown cotton production shows a tendency to increase. This is due to the output of the Nuba mountain district of the

province of Kordofan. Here the rainfall and soil are said to be well adapted to cotton. The rainfall over the three southern provinces will average 30 to 45 inches annually. At Juba, in the Mongalla province, the mean annual rainfall is almost 38 inches, while at Mialakal, in the Upper Nile province, it is 35.5 inches.

The rainy season is from February to October, with light rains during the dry season. Over much of the area, however, it becomes very dry during the non-rainy months, and the natives, in many places, must depend upon wells for their water. The Government have bored wells in the large towns and villages.

The climate is very hot all the year round, and few white men remain during the summer months. The Government allow the civil and military officers who are assigned to this area extra compensation known as "climate allowance". The hot months are most trying for white men. White women cannot possibly stand them. They would mean the death of white children.

Transportation difficulties are also very serious. Practically all cotton is carried to the gin by the natives on their head. Ginned cotton is transported to the rail-head or river port by camel or truck. After it reaches the railway or river many miles still separate it from the seaport. The following distances give some idea of the problem of transportation. From the gin at Kadugli cotton must be trucked to El Obeid, a distance of 168 miles. From the gin at Talodi it is 226 miles to the rail-head at El Obeid. It is almost 1,000 miles from El Obeid to Port Sudan, the seaport. Cotton from Malakal and points south is carried about 500 miles by river and about the same distance by rail before it reaches a salt-water port. The extreme southern point of Juba is 1,000 miles up the Nile from Khartum.

The problems of growing cotton in the rain area of the Sudan are many, and often very difficult. The fact that much of the acreage is far from the river and railway centres presents a transportation problem which in itself is almost prohibitory. As the country develops

and roads are built, this stumbling-block will to some extent be overcome. But the Sudan now has no money and is not likely to have any in the immediate future to build roads or railways. Privately owned truck lines are at present operated, but their charges are high, so high in fact that cotton seed is not shipped out of the "raingrown" area. All seed not used for planting is burned at the gins, as it is not considered worth the cost of transportation to the sea-board.

Labour is also an important factor. The native is lazy. He has very few wants. Most, if not all, of these can be supplied without work. For ages his principal pursuits have been hunting, fishing, and making raids on his neighbours. It is very difficult to turn his thoughts to cotton-growing. The few natives who do any kind of farming require the constant supervision of white men. But living conditions are such that a white man cannot, or will not, live long enough in the country to learn how to handle black labour. If he attempt to remain, death claims him. And the land in most cases must be cleared. Here again the native is not inclined to work unless a white man drives him. And the white man dies almost as soon as he learns how to do so.

The only white men of Northern races who can live in the country are Government officials, who are paid such good salaries, given such excellent "climate allowances", assured such satisfactory pensions, and guaranteed such exceptional furloughs that, from an economic point of view, no commercial or industrial enterprise could afford to offer such inducements and hope to pay dividends.

The situation in the "rain-grown" district may be summed up in this true story. "What does England get out of this area?" a civil servant of the Sudan Government was recently asked by an inquirer seeking for information. "Oh, nothing," he answered, "except a few billets for us public school men." "But does she get nothing else out of these provinces?" was the second query. After some little hesitation the reply was, "Yes. Look over there and you'll see a few graves,

and look up most of the men who have been able to get out alive, and you'll find physical wrecks."

This means that while "Cotton is King" in the "rain-grown" areas of the Sudan, he rules over districts where the game is not worth the candle. This, therefore, brings us to consider the flood-grown crops in the Tokar and Kassala districts. The Tokar Delta is one of the oldest and, probably, one of the most promising cotton-growing areas in the Sudan. It depends on the flood waters of the Baraka River. This stream rises in the mountains of Abyssinia and flows through Eritrea towards the Red Sea. A short distance from that body the river forms a wide delta. The Tokar cotton land is located in this plain.

The Baraka is dry except during the flood season of July, August, and early September. During this period the Delta is covered by a flood of six to eight flushes of water, leaving a heavy deposit of silt over the fan-shaped surface. No water now ever reaches the sea. The region of flood is always shifting, owing to the building up of the land by the deposit of silt. At one time the flood area was on the west side; at the present moment it is on the east side of the delta.

The amount of water and silt is not uniform over the flooded district. Often much of the land receiving water does not get enough to carry the crop to maturity. There appears to be no way to identify the poorly watered land from the well-irrigated soil except to plant and hope that the flood has been sufficient. Sometimes this poorly watered land amounts to as much as one-fifth of the total flood area, and thus the money spent in planting and working it represents a heavy loss.

No general method of control of the flood has been attempted. It has been suggested that a dam be built in the hills and that canals be used to supply water as needed. Such a procedure would be very expensive. Experts are not assured of its feasibility. A factor that must be considered in a control plan is the wind, and its effect on the Delta. The silt deposited on the plains of the Delta blows very badly during the dry season,

which lasts for about five months. This silt fills the air like fine sand during the windy season. It moves across barren plains in a manner almost beyond belief. Large mounds are formed in a few hours. Houses are covered and the whole landscape is changed in a short time. This drifting silt is largely responsible for the change in the area flooded from year to year. If a system of ditches and dikes were built, they would, no doubt, have to be remade every year. The present system of letting the flood take its course is therefore probably sounder than any other plan that could be devised. It holds down expenses.

The soil is a fine silt, very fertile and well suited to cotton. Being near the sea, the humidity is more favourable and the climate milder than in any other section of the Sudan. The outstanding difficulty is the smallness of this area. In 1930, which may be taken as a more or less typical year, the flood covered but 90,000 feddans or acres, of which about 60,000 were in cotton. The crop amounted to about 44,400 kantars, that is to say, to about 9,000 standard American bales, a negligible output.

Cotton-growing at Kassala is, in many ways, similar to that at Tokar. The crop is planted in the flood delta of the Gash River, which rises in the Abyssinian mountains and spills over the level lands north of Kassala. Its waters now never reach the sea.

Like the Baraka River at Tokar, the Gash flows only during the rainy season. The flood starts, as a rule, about June and continues for a period of 75 to 100 days. The water carries a heavy charge of silt, which is deposited over the delta plain. The usual flood is four or five times greater than that of Tokar, and therefore wets the soil much better.

Canals and dikes have been built to control this flood. The area of the water is more certain than is that of the Tokar delta. Since the flow is more or less steady, it is a simple matter to regulate it.

The soil is a very fine dark brown silt. The sub-soil is sandy to gravelly. The climate differs from that of

Tokar in that there is much more rainfall. The rain, however, is of little value because it falls during the summer while the flood is running. The growing season is dry, but somewhat more uniform than that of Tokar. On the whole, it may be said that the climate of Kassala is less favourable for cotton than that of Tokar.

The area under cotton depends on the size of the flood. As a general rule it is sufficient to allow a crop of about 30,000 feddans of cotton, in addition to several hundred feddans of dura grown and used for food by the natives. In size the delta is about 60 miles long and 18 to 25 miles wide. Its extent is, therefore, so

AREA, YIELD AND AVERAGE YIELD PER FEDDAN OF THE LIGHT GOVERNMENT PUMP STATIONS NORTH OF KHARTUM, 1919-1920 TO 1930-1931

| <i>Year.</i> | <i>Area (Feddans)</i> | <i>Yield (Kantars).</i> | <i>Average Yield per Feddan (Kantars).</i> |
|--------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| 1919-20 . . | 241 | 904 | 3.75 |
| 1920-21 . . | 597 | 2,686 | 4.50 |
| 1921-22 . . | 1,105 | 3,024 | 2.73 |
| 1922-23 . . | 1,115 | 3,577 | 3.20 |
| 1923-24 . . | 3,091 | 11,549 | 3.73 |
| 1924-25 . . | 3,478 | 15,079 | 4.02 |
| 1925-26 . . | 4,559 | 15,685 | 3.44 |
| 1926-27 . . | 5,038 | 22,430 | 4.45 |
| 1927-28 . . | 5,231 | 15,032 | 2.87 |
| 1928-29 . . | 4,623 | 15,073 | 3.26 |
| 1929-30 . . | 5,868 | 18,323 | 3.12 |
| 1930-31 . . | 6,444 | 14,450 | 2.24 |
| 1931-32 . . | 5,418 | 17,545 | 3.23 |
| 1932-33 . . | 3,764 | 16,391 | 4.35 |

circumscribed that it can, at best, produce but a relatively negligible quantity of cotton.

With the "rain-grown" and the "flood" cotton lands thus disposed of, we pass to the third system of watering. This includes the "pump" area and is confined to plantations along the banks of the Nile in Khartum, Berber, and Dongola Provinces. Each farm is equipped with its own pump and draws its water from the Nile. These estates may be divided into two general classes (1) Government owned and controlled and (2) private owned.

There are eight pump stations owned and controlled by the Government, where cotton is grown along with other crops. The State established these centres as an insurance against a food famine. The food crop of the natives was so uncertain that the authorities felt that they should have an area under irrigation where *dura*, the staff of life of the Sudanese, might be grown. With the opening up of the Gezira, this danger has been reduced to a minimum. The Government have, accordingly, converted many of these farms into cotton plantations.

The first cotton-growing of any importance in the Sudan was carried on along the Nile north of Khartum by private interests. There are, at present, in that area something like 140 plantations ranging in size from 5,000 to a few feddans. The oldest of these is the plantation of the Sudan Plantations Syndicate at Zeidah. All private pumps require a Government licence. They are of two kinds. One allows water to be drawn from the river during the entire year. The other is called a "seasonal licence" and authorizes the use of water only at specified seasons.

The soil is dark brown in colour, having a high percentage of clay. Further away from the river the soil becomes somewhat sandy. The area is limited, not only as to land that will grow cotton but also as to water supply. The Government will only allow a fixed quantity of water to be withdrawn from the Nile, and the operation of the pumps presents a real problem. All are gas or crude oil engines. A Greek, or some other European, is usually in charge, because the natives know little or nothing about machinery and, as yet, show no desire to learn. The Sudanese prefers to use his old-style water-wheel. With this method the total crop will not increase very much. The quantity of cotton now furnished by these private owned "pump lands" is too small to mean anything to Lancashire.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GEZIRA

It may not be amiss to say that it has now been shown that—

(1) cotton is, by far, the leading cash crop of the Sudan ;

(2) an impossible climate, labour difficulties, and transportation problems make it improbable that the province of Kordofan can produce a large quantity of "rain-grown" cotton ;

(3) the area of the Tokar and Kassala districts, where "flood" cotton is raised, is so small that these sections cannot supply Lancashire with anything more than an insignificant number of bales ; and

(4) the necessity of husbanding the waters of the Nile in order to safeguard Egypt's admitted traditional and historical rights, the temperamental inability of the Sudanese to handle machinery, and the restricted area where cotton can be grown in the Sudan north of Khartum, preclude the possibility of lands watered by pumps placing on the market any considerable supply of cotton. The corollary to all this is that the one and only hope of Manchester is that the Gezira plains, where gravity irrigation is used, may prove to be so bountiful a producer of cotton that they will justify the hopes England placed in the Sudan when Parliament pledged the credit of the British tax-payer to pay the capital and interest on an aggregate indebtedness of £13,000,000 contracted by the Khartum Government.

In turning to Lord Lloyd's official report on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of the Sudan in 1925 we learn why the British Parliament backed the future of the Sudan with so much hard cash. It was because it was felt that this money would bring the

Senaar Dam into being and thus mark the beginning of a new era in the Sudan.

"The elimination, wherever possible, of uncertain factors in production," said Lord Lloyd, who was then British High Commissioner to Egypt, "is a problem which must inevitably present itself at an early stage of any ordered and systematic development of a country in which rain and flood are the traditional arbiters of fortune, the stage, I mean, at which progress is checked by the uncertainty of the future and the lack of guaranteed returns to meet the expenditure involved. This difficulty has been foreseen, and the introduction of irrigation into one of the most thickly populated areas of the Sudan will, it is hoped, not only ensure increased prosperity to the inhabitants, but the degree of stability in revenue returns without which the Government would not be justified in extending development to meet the needs of other parts of the country."

And after having thus explained why it was that irrigation meant so much to the Sudan, Lord Lloyd centred his attention upon the Gezira plan and said—

"In my opinion the project is excellent both in conception and execution. Means have been found to associate the native so closely with the undertaking that the personal ties which have always existed between the Government of the Sudan and its inhabitants have remained undisturbed and have, in fact, been strengthened by identity of interest in a venture of mutual benefit. It is, I think, an entirely new conception that the application of Western science to native economic conditions in a project of such moment to the country should take the form of a partnership in which the native, the Government, and the Company managing the concern on behalf of the Government, each take an agreed percentage of profits. The native cultivates his own land under instruction and supervision, and delivers his cotton to the Sudan Plantations Syndicate, who market it for him under the best conditions obtainable, while the Government supplies him with the water required. Of the profits the native receives 40 per cent, the Syndicate

25 per cent, and the Government 35 per cent, and the community of interest of the three partners should be the basis of its future success.”¹

Lord Lloyd thinks in terms of governmental efficiency. He therefore hastened to consider the Gezira project from that angle. Here is what he said :—

“ I would draw attention to another aspect of the scheme which should be emphasized. Unless particular care is taken, economic considerations may run counter to accepted administrative principles and endanger the normal development of existing social systems. Administrative policy in the Sudan is concerned with fostering and improving all that is good in native institutions, and building a structure of reform on their foundations, and the method adopted in the inauguration of this economic project conforms entirely with our administrative policy. The native cultivates land which is his own property, the social system to which he is accustomed remains undisturbed and, in fact, just as we endeavour to improve existing native institutions from more civilized countries, so have we endeavoured in the Gezira project to improve native cultivation and production with the aid of scientific methods without hindrance to or alteration of the normal social development of the community.”

And passing from such considerations to the supreme test of results the distinguished statesman observed that—

“ the value of the scheme has been strikingly illustrated in the first season of its inception. Rains have been generally poor, and the floods of the Gash and Baraka rivers much below average, but the existence of 80,000 feddans of excellent cotton in the Gezira will prevent any general depression of trade and will supply just that element of stability in the economic position which, as I have pointed out above, is so necessary for the country at the present stage of its development. Moreover, a third of the cultivable area is devoted to the production of food and fodder crops and guarantees the

¹ *Report on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of the Sudan in 1925*, p. 5.

native from any danger of scarcity. The benefit of this provision, which makes an appreciable percentage of the community entirely self-supporting, is very evident this year when the general failure of the rain and food cultivation will practically exhaust existing supplies."

The 1926 Sudan report does not bear Lord Lloyd's signature. It is signed by Mr. Neville Henderson, Acting High Commissioner for Egypt. It emphasizes the fact that the opening of the Senaar Dam "marked the beginning of a new era in the development of the Sudan". It contains the significant statement that—

"thanks to favourable conditions and good will and good work on the part of all concerned, the first year's results from the cultivation of cotton on a large scale were highly satisfactory."

It adds that—

"a particularly satisfactory feature of the Gezira is its undoubted popularity with the people. Cultivation and production have been quickened by science, to the vast advantage of the native, but there has been no upheaval of the social system. The people live in their villages, pursue their customary avocations, and reap contentment and prosperity from their profitable association with the Government and with the Gezira Syndicate, under whose instruction and supervision the crop is grown and marketed."

The 1927 report, issued over the signature of Sir John Maffey, Governor-General of the Sudan, stresses the point that—

"the second season of the working of the Gezira irrigation scheme was only less successful than the first. The co-operation of the cultivators with the inspectors of the Sudan Plantations Syndicate, the favourable climate conditions, and a relative absence of cotton pests, combined to produce a crop which again exceeded our estimates."

But sound judgment and statesmanship caused the 1927 report to point out that—

"It may not be amiss, however, to sound a note of caution here, for none of the three partners in the scheme

would be justified in counting upon a continuance of such unexpected returns, and provision must be made for the leaner years which inevitably tend to occur in any agricultural enterprise."

Sir John Maffey's 1928 account of his stewardship contains the following paragraph :—

"In the economic sphere, the results of the Gezira Irrigation scheme are of primary importance. In last year's report I sounded a note of warning that the unexpectedly good results of the first two seasons must not be treated by any of the three partners in the scheme as normal. This warning has been justified, the yield of the 1927-8 crop being nearly 33 per cent less than that of the two previous seasons ; and the prospects of the 1928-9 crop imply that the yield will be little, if any, greater than that of 1927-8. There is, however, no cause for pessimism, as these yields are only very slightly below the average that we expect. Exceptionally favourable results in the Gash Delta and Tokar, combined with somewhat higher prices for cotton, enabled the Government to pass a substantial sum to reserves against the still leaner years which, in agriculture, cannot be avoided."

The summary of the condition of the Sudan in 1929 was issued by the Acting Governor-General, Mr. B. H. Bell. It mentions the completion of the first extension of the Gezira scheme. It then goes on to say that—

"the extension of the area irrigated for cotton growing in the Gezira, in addition to its direct agricultural advantages, will considerably reduce the over-capitalization of the scheme which was an inevitable result of the conditions prevailing after the War ; and when certain extensions have been carried out, the capital cost of the whole undertaking will be low enough to make it reasonably certain, even on a conservative estimate of yields and prices, that the scheme will pay its way over an average number of years."

And after having thus pictured the Gezira project, not as a great money-making enterprise but as a scheme which "will pay its way over an average

number of years", the Acting Governor-General recorded that—

"At the end of the cotton season of 1928-9, the Sudan appeared to be approaching a position of financial stability, with reserves adequate to absorb the shocks of bad years necessarily associated with direct and indirect dependence on agricultural enterprise. Since then, however, the heavy fall in the price of cotton and other agricultural produce, coupled with the certainty of a poor yield from the Gezira crop of 1929-1930, has caused a serious set-back. The effect on the financial situation has not had time to appear in 1929 and the year closed with an adequate surplus, but it is impossible to be optimistic about the prospect for 1930, and it is clear that the revenues set up in the past will be seriously depleted and that the expenditure of the Government must be rigidly restricted."

It will be recalled that it was on 3rd August, 1929, that Mr. Arthur Henderson and Muhammad Mahmud Pasha exchanged the correspondence which envisaged an Anglo-Egyptian agreement. The definitive "conversations" between the British Foreign Secretary and Mustafa Nahas Pasha occurred some months later. This writing of letters and these subsequent meetings preceded the issue of the report "on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of the Sudan in 1929". This is said because the Acting Governor-General's summary of conditions in 1929 bears the date of 19th July, 1930. The report referring to 1928 was signed on 7th May, 1929.

These dates tell an interesting story. It is that when Mr. Arthur Henderson and Muhammad Mahmud Pasha wrote one another on 3rd August, 1929, and when that British Minister and Mustafa Nahas Pasha subsequently thrashed out matters, the report for 1929, dated 19th July, 1930, was not available. The facts upon which it was based had not been collected. The latest official summary of conditions in the Sudan then extant was that issued on 7th May, 1929.

It took a more or less hopeful view of the future of

the Sudan. It certainly was not pessimistic in tone. As a matter of fact it made the specific statement that "there is no cause for pessimism". It said nothing to warrant the fear that England might be called upon to pay out the money of the British tax-payer in order to make good Britain's endorsement of the £13,000,000 bond issue of the Sudan Government. It did not infer that Lancashire might not, after all, be able to obtain from the Gezira lands a large supply of first-class cotton. It did not suggest that, perhaps, the Sudan might be a liability and not an asset. It was, in a word, a document which submitted facts that made it perfectly reasonable for England to hold on to the Sudan if she felt that in law and equity she was entitled to do so. This she considered to be the case.

The report upon conditions in 1929, which bears a date somewhat subsequent to the breaking-up of the Anglo-Egyptian Conference, has already been cited. It said "it is impossible to be optimistic about the prospect for 1930". Writing under date of 31st May, 1931, and, therefore, speaking of what happened in 1930, Sir John Maffey, the Governor-General of the Sudan, said :—

"In 1930, as in 1929, economic events claimed first consideration. The course of events has been disadvantageous and has temporarily shaken the confidence, expressed in my last report, in the financial soundness of the Gezira scheme, with the success of which the prosperity of the Government is so closely bound up."

This categorical statement is not suspended in mid-air. It is backed up by the very next paragraph, which is couched in these words :—

"This effect has been produced partly by the spectacular slump in prices, in conformity with which the price of cotton has fallen to levels lower than any touched since the War, but mainly by the very low average yield of the 1929-1930 season and the still lower yield anticipated for the 1930-1 season, which have begun to cast doubt on the ability of the Gezira area to produce a crop which can be sold profitably at any but

prices much higher than those which we are entitled to expect."

And after having thus explained why he said that "the course of events has been disadvantageous and has temporarily shaken the confidence, expressed in my last report, in the financial soundness of the Gezira scheme", Sir John Maffey added—

"We may conceivably be forced into the position that for many years to come—until in fact we are far past the peak of our annual payments for interest and sinking fund on the capital invested in the scheme—we shall have to regard the Gezira scheme as, on the whole, a liability to be liquidated by annual subsidies, not only from the direct receipts attributable to the scheme, but also from the normal administration revenues of the Government. Time alone will resolve these doubts."

The moral courage which dictated such emphatic language caused the Governor-General to record that—

"in the circumstances the financial problem of the Sudan in the near future will no longer be that foreseen last year—the provision of capital for development and other purposes connected with expanding trade—but the balancing of the budget."

Before dealing with other problems connected with his high office, Sir John Maffey pointed out that the dark clouds had a silver lining. Here are his exact words :—

"For the moment, therefore, my chief anxiety is caused by uncertainty as to the Gezira yields. Such steps as are possible to improve agricultural conditions are being taken; a change in rotation has been introduced, new seed is being imported from Egypt, and everything possible is being done to improve our research organization. Until, however, there has been actual improvement in results we shall not be able to see our way clearly. . . . It would be unsound to base our calculations on the results of two bad years and to ignore the fact that the average result, over the whole period of the Gezira scheme up to date, has been such as to

justify an anticipation of yield sufficient to make it self-supporting in the wider sense in which the term is here being used."

It will have been observed that the Governor-General of the Sudan has not been impressed so much by the low price realized by the output of the Gezira lands as he has been by the recent very low average yield of the plantations. The sum brought by cotton is not fixed at Khartum but in the markets of the world. Sir John Maffey is, therefore, not disconcerted by the fact that the universal depression has adversely affected the receipts of the Sudan Plantations Syndicate. What bothers him is the circumstance that the Sudan Government is not only getting a low figure for a small crop, but that the average yield of the Gezira project appeared, when he wrote his report for 1930, to be going from bad to worse.

The official report on conditions in the Sudan in 1931 is dated 15th July, 1932, and bears the signature of Governor-General Sir John Maffey. Its paragraph 12 reads as follows :

"Unfavourable climatic conditions, blackarm and leaf-curl were, in our view, responsible for the low yields of 2·32 kantars a feddan in 1929-30 and 1·35 in 1930-31. Climatic conditions are a normal risk, and the experiments of fourteen years had shown that, on the average, they cannot do much harm. Prompt measures were taken to readjust our agricultural methods. . . . Pessimists, however, maintain that our troubles were radical and that these measures would furnish no remedy to a soil which they held to be in progressive deterioration. But before the end of 1931 it was clear that the pessimists were wrong. At the time of writing a yield of four kantars over 174,000 feddans and five kantars over 20,000 feddans or a total of 800,000 kantars is assured."

The 1932 report is also signed by Sir John Maffey. It is dated 11th June, 1933.

Its paragraph 12 repeats what the Governor-General wrote in 1932 about a harvest of 800,000 kantars. This result is described as "the largest and finest crop of

cotton that it (the Gezira) has ever produced." The statement is made in an earlier section of the report, that the prospects of the Sudan for 1933 "are definitely brighter".

Before passing in review statistics bearing upon the recent average annual yield per acre of the Gezira lands, it may, perhaps, be well to cite figures which bear upon the total acreage which the Gezira Plantations Syndicate has had under cotton cultivation. Previous to 1925-6 the quantity under the plough did not, in any one year, exceed 22,500 feddans (or acres). When the Senaar Dam was opened (1925-6) the acreage was raised from 21,000 to slightly more than 80,000 feddans. The annual increase has been—

| | | | | |
|---------|---|---|---|----------------|
| 1925-26 | . | . | . | 80,031 feddans |
| 1926-27 | . | . | . | 100,058 " |
| 1927-28 | . | . | . | 100,768 " |
| 1928-29 | . | . | . | 131,292 " |
| 1929-30 | . | . | . | 174,164 " |
| 1930-31 | . | . | . | 196,799 " |
| 1931-32 | . | . | . | 194,935 " |
| 1932-33 | . | . | . | 195,941 " |

It appears to have been the policy to increase the surface under cultivation as rapidly as possible. The yield per acre prior to 1925-6 had varied from 5.32 kantars to as low as 2.21 kantars per feddan. The last two years when water was pumped on the land, 1923-4 and 1924-5, the yield was 2.88 and 2.21 kantars per feddan, but the area was small, being only about 22,000 acres. Most of the crops previous to 1925-6 had yielded between 3 and 3½ kantars per feddan. The feddan yield from 1911-12 to date is as follows:—

| | | | | |
|---------|---|---|---|--------------|
| 1911-12 | . | . | . | 5.32 kantars |
| 1912-13 | . | . | . | 5.03 " |
| 1913-14 | . | . | . | 3.80 " |
| 1914-15 | . | . | . | 5.29 " |
| 1915-16 | . | . | . | 3.32 " |
| 1916-17 | . | . | . | 3.31 " |
| 1917-18 | . | . | . | 3.29 " |
| 1918-19 | . | . | . | 3.33 " |
| 1919-20 | . | . | . | 5.26 " |

| | | | | | |
|---------|---|---|---|------|---------|
| 1920-21 | . | . | . | 3.27 | kantars |
| 1921-22 | . | . | . | 3.92 | " |
| 1922-23 | . | . | . | 3.66 | " |
| 1923-24 | . | . | . | 2.88 | " |
| 1924-25 | . | . | . | 2.21 | " |
| 1925-26 | . | . | . | 4.79 | " |
| 1926-27 | . | . | . | 4.77 | " |
| 1927-28 | . | . | . | 3.29 | " |
| 1928-29 | . | . | . | 3.55 | " |
| 1929-30 | . | . | . | 2.33 | " |
| 1930-31 | . | . | . | 1.36 | " |

The *Report on the Finances, Administration and Condition of the Sudan in 1932*, the official publication from which the figures in this chapter have been taken, instead of giving exact data, as in preceding years, contains this note :

"The season is unfavourable and the yield will be under average."

It is admitted in the Sudan that the price of cotton was the important factor in bringing about the rapid increase in acreage. At the close of the War, work was resumed on the Dam and the cotton area was widened as rapidly as possible.

The officers in charge of the project recognized the value of agricultural research, but they felt that the scheme was more of an engineering problem than an agricultural one. The construction of the Dam, the canals, the roads, the light railways, and the ploughing of the land with large tractors required the skill of engineers. The natives understood how to plant and to cultivate cotton. As new areas were brought under water the engineers who laid out the canals also made the plans for supervising the crops.

As time went on, more attention was paid to the purely agricultural side of the problem. The experimental station was enlarged and such matters as the best adapted varieties, the date of planting, amount of water and date of application of it, and disease and insect control were studied. In a word, the agricultural aspect of the problem became more and more important.

Several causes for the decline in past yields have been

advanced. The outstanding one is disease. The most common diseases of the cotton plant in the Sudan are "Black arm" and "Leaf-curl". "Black arm" has been known for years, but "Leaf-curl" has only become general in the last three or four years. It has been found that "Black arm", and to a lesser extent "Leaf-curl", are associated with a water-logged condition of the soil. Water-logging may be the result of excessive irrigation water or of a heavy rain.

The average annual rainfall of the Gezira is not much over 8 inches. It often falls, however, during July or August or just at planting-time. As a rule the land is irrigated before planting. If heavy rains set in after this planting, followed by cool cloudy weather, as is often the case, a condition very favourable to plant disease is the result.

The need of drainage is apparent. Owing to the nature of the soil the drainage problem is not a simple one even for trained engineers, because the rain often falls in torrents on the flooded fields. The soil is almost impervious to water. It therefore allows little or no under-drainage, while the flat surface retards the run-off. The result is that the fields remain under water until dried up by evaporation.

The construction of surface drains is said to be impossible with the present income. Regardless of how badly they are needed, it is heard that they cannot be built until a few more good crops are grown. It is the hope of those in charge that they will be able to produce a good crop or two and that prices will improve to a point where they can put in this needed improvement at an early date.

It is thus somewhat surprising to read in the latest official report submitted by the Governor-General of the Sudan and dated 11th June, 1933, paragraph 234 :

"The 1932-33 crop was sown under unfavourable conditions of heavy rain, consequently considerable areas were put in very late. The precautionary measures taken in the preceding season were again followed, yet not only have blackarm and leaf-curl done serious

damage, but, so far, the season being a bad one for cotton, little recovery is taking place. A low yield per feddan is anticipated and the crop is likely to be well below the average of those harvested hitherto."

The practically constant decrease in cotton production per acre in the Gezira, which fell from 5.32 kantars per feddan in 1911-12 to 1.36 in 1930-31, caused the Sudan Government to adopt radical measures to deal with these conditions. Prior to 1931-32 the native grew a food crop known as dura (grain sorghum) and lubia (cow peas) on the land following cotton. In spite of all that the officials could do, the old cotton plants were often cut off instead of being pulled out by the roots. The result was that they grew the following year. It was found that this second growth was infected with "leaf-curl". It was also ascertained that the "white fly" carried the disease from these second growth plants to the new crop in the adjoining fields. In this way it was spread through the Gezira.

Reference to the report of the Governor-General of the Sudan, dated 15th July, 1932, shows how the authorities met this emergency :

"In the early part of the year it was decided to change the system of crop rotation to permit cotton being followed by two years' fallow. Lubia was cut out except for a small area needed to provide fodder for plough cattle. The dura segregated into blocks outside the cotton rotation, the area of dura per holding remaining at 4.375 feddans. The effect of this was to reduce the cotton area to gross area from 10 in 30 to 10 in 34.375. The resulting reduction in the cotton area was neutralized as far as possible by taking in small areas previously considered unsuitable for cultivation. The inclusion of these areas and the completion of the second northern extension brought the total area comprised in the scheme from 300,000 feddans in 1926 to 682,000 feddans in 1931."

It is but fair to say that this system, while strongly supported by many experts, is stoutly attacked by others. Its critics say that it is unsound because it returns

nothing to the soil, but if it effectively cuts down "leaf-curl" it may prove to be an excellent innovation. Time alone will tell. But can this system go on indefinitely? Is it a makeshift? Is it a solution? Can the irrigation system of the Sudan keep pace, economically, with this type of cultivation?

We do not know. Only a specialist can answer such questions. All we shall say is that the report of the Governor-General of the Sudan, dated 11th June, 1933, contains a section, No. 246, which reads as follows:

"A further change in the crop rotation has been decided upon for the coming year. This, while retaining the principle of two years of fallow before the cotton crop, which was adopted in the late change, brings the grain crop back to the rotation and enables the leguminous shift to be reintroduced as soon as the position in regard to pests makes this possible. The new rotation is in effect a four-course one as far as cotton is concerned, and replaces a three-course rotation with the grain crops confined to separate non-rotatable areas."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE GAME AND THE CANDLE

THE Winning of the Sudan is an epic of British achievement. Its outstanding hero is Evelyn Baring, first Earl of Cromer. It was his honesty, perseverance, and genius that put Egypt in a position to undertake the conquest of the Sudan. It was his judgment of men that picked out Horatio Herbert Kitchener and made that gallant officer the Sirdar of the Egyptian Army. It was the unswerving loyalty and driving power of the diplomatist that made it possible for Kitchener to plan and carry through the campaigns which resulted in the destruction of the power of the Khalifa. And, last but not least, it was the Proconsul's imagination and sense of the realities of life that called into being the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium which did away with Ottoman claims upon the Sudan, wiped out foreign privileges in those parts, and created that type of patriarchal government best suited to the Black Country.

The recognition of the independence of Egypt "with reservations" has fundamentally changed the basic principles which underlay the relations between England and Egypt when the Condominium was conceived. Egypt now lays claim to the Sudan. The present partnership is gall to the statesmen and publicists who speak for Egypt in Parliament and in the Press. England refuses to agree to a dissolution of the firm of George and Fuad except upon the condition that its great asset, the Black Country, be transferred to Great Britain. London takes the position that the junior partner's apparent desire to dissolve the old relationship is no reason why England should retire from a country with whose history the names of so many of her sons are inseparably connected.

This stalemate has its repercussions upon Anglo-Egyptian relations. It seems that Mr. Arthur Henderson

and Mustafa Nahas Pasha had been able, in 1930, to settle practically all of the questions that separated England and Egypt with the single exception of the status of the Sudan. They were unable to find a formula for it upon which they could agree.

Mustafa Nahas Pasha succeeded Saad Zaghlul Pasha as the leader of the *Wafd* when "the Father of the People" was summoned to a better world. He presided over the destinies of his party when it fulminated against the Lord-Lloyd—Muhammad-Mahmud-Pasha Nile Waters Agreement. The manifesto which denounced that Accord met with his hearty approval. And yet it is understood that, in unison upon all essential points except the Sudan, he and Mr. Arthur Henderson were within hailing distance of a settlement even of that issue when their "conversations" came to an end. Mutual concessions appear to have bridged all but a narrow span of the wide abyss that at one time separated England and Egypt whenever the Black Country was mentioned.

We are convinced that sentimental attachment to the Sudan did not prevent the British delegates from finding the necessary means to span this open space. The lands south of Wady Halfa mean a great deal to Englishmen. They are the scene of a chapter in English history which is both sad and glorious, distressing and inspiring. We can readily understand why Britons should be loth to alter the status of their connection with a wide expanse which the blood of men of their race has brought to its present state of advancement.

English sense of fair play precludes the possibility of Great Britain making any settlement with Egypt which would jeopardize the interests of the Sudanese. But, in these days of budgetary worries and of world-wide responsibilities, in these times when the British tax-payer is overburdened and empire commitments are multiplying, the entire problem should be examined from every possible angle. It is of momentous importance.

Sentiment can hardly be permitted to dominate the

subject. It is reasonable to suppose that London and Cairo can elaborate the details of an adjustment which will safeguard the rights of the inhabitants of the Black Country. The subject should be looked at, primarily, from the standpoint of what a solution of the Egyptian question means to the British tax-payer, to British industry, and to British finance.

In envisaging the problem from this angle of vision, it may not be amiss to inquire why England occupied Egypt in 1882. Revolution was then rampant in that country. Arabi Pasha was the leader of the turbulent element. He and his associates sought to destroy the authority of the Khedive. "It was a challenge," writes Elgood in his epoch-making *Transit of Egypt*, "that Her Majesty's Government could not pass in silence. Having made up their mind that the tranquillity of Egypt depended upon maintaining the Khedive upon the throne, they refused to watch his complete effacement. . . . Egypt had grievances enough and to spare ; but revolution could not bring about their reform, and to Great Britain a peaceful Egypt had become a vital necessity. Her communications with the east depended upon the integrity of the Suez Canal, and she could not permit a domestic dispute to threaten them."¹

Translated into the words used in the unilateral declaration of 28th February, 1922, which recognized the independence of Egypt "with reservations", this quotation means that Great Britain occupied the Valley of the Nile in 1882 in order to safeguard "the security of the communications of the British Empire in Egypt". The maintenance of law and order in the Khedivial dominions was, of course, essential to this end. But the expansion of British trade in Egypt, the consolidation of British finances in that territory, the spread of Christianity in those parts, the finding of billets for English gentlemen in that country, did not dictate Mr. Gladstone's political strategy.

Lord Cromer fixed the polity of England in Egypt. He administered Egypt for the benefit of the Egyptians.

¹ Elgood, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

He was punctiliously careful to safeguard the interests of the *fellah*. He looked at every problem from the point of view of the local population. As long as he was the benevolent autocrat of the Valley of the Nile, no Englishman ever received a contract from or sold an invoice of goods to the Egyptian Government because he was an Englishman. A fair field and no favour was his motto. His practice lent emphasis to his words. He left Egypt in 1907.

Gossip says that certain of his successors have not leaned backwards as far as did the incomparable Cromer. Rumour has it that across the quarter of a century that has passed since the retirement of the great Proconsul, other mouthpieces of the London Foreign Office have lent their influence to favour British commerce. This may be true or not. The fact, however, stands out that carping critics may say what they will and jealous tongues may wag as much as they like, but the Egyptian customs are not manipulated to favour English firms, Government contracts are adjudicated in the open market, the bulk of the commerce is not in English hands, and British banks handle but their fair share of the finances of the country.

When the searchlight of investigation is thrown upon British rule in Egypt, the fact is driven home that, apart from "the security of Imperial communications", Great Britain gets practically nothing out of the country except a relatively insignificant number of attractive government posts for Englishmen and comfortable winter quarters for a small contingent of British officers. Those special privileges enjoyed by foreigners in the Near East, known as the Capitulations, hamper the administrative control of the country. And the precedent set by Lord Cromer attenuates, if it does not eliminate, those collateral advantages that any other Power would certainly derive from its suzerainty were it in England's place.

But it has already been said that Mr. Arthur Henderson and Mustafa Nahas Pasha appear to have been able to agree upon making a Gibraltar or English

enclave of the strip of land necessary for the security of the Suez Canal. In other words, it is generally accepted that the Wafdist leader was prepared, in 1930, to allow British troops to safeguard the integrity of that international waterway. This means that the successor of Saad Zaghlul Pasha seems to have then been willing to put into black and white, or into the shape of wax and parchment, a grant of the very objective which brought England to Egypt in 1882.

The corollary to all this is that a Treaty guaranteeing "the security of Imperial communications in Egypt" is within the grasp of England and that the sole price that has to be paid for such a pact is, for all practical purposes—

(1) the elaboration of an accord in respect of the Sudan ;

(2) the surrender of a few choice Government berths for Englishmen ; and

(3) the loss of charming winter quarters for a small contingent of British soldiers, where some of the younger officers sometimes find rich American wives.

The two latter considerations may be dismissed. The first cannot be brushed aside. It should be analysed.

The French, in their practical way, often ask the question : "*le jeu vaut-il la chandelle ?*" The integrity of Imperial communications in Egypt, the consecration by a Treaty of the objective which brought England to Egypt in 1882, is the "candle". The "game" is the status of the Sudan.

We know what the "candle" is worth. Its value is constant. It is the safety of the British Empire. This is as true to-day as it was in 1882.

We cannot fix with the same precision the value of the "game". When the Gezira project held out roseate hopes for the future of the Sudan Plantations Syndicate and when the British tax-payer could view with equanimity the improbability of paying out hard cash as a result of his endorsement of the £13,000,000 bond issue of the Sudan Government, the value of the "game" was ∞ .

It behoved England in 1930 to convert this unknown

quantity into something concrete and to find out what it represented. This appears at that time to have been done. It was then that Mr. Arthur Henderson and Mustafa Nahas Pasha were having their "conversations". It was essential that London should then know what the Sudan was really worth. In the light of the data then available it was considered that this x attained such proportions, the Black Country was so valuable, that it was the part of wisdom to refuse the "candle" which Mustafa Nahas Pasha is said to have offered England.

The facts revealed by the report signed by the Acting Governor-General of the Sudan on 19th July, 1930, and those set forth in Sir John Maffey's accounts of his stewardship dated 31st May, 1931, 15th July, 1932, and 11th June, 1933, cause us to wipe out this unknown quantity x and to replace it by y , that is to say, by the new unknown factor resulting from the evidence furnished by these four official documents.

It is useless to speculate as to what y really represents. New information has become available since these two reports of 19th July, 1930, and 31st May, 1931, were issued. This more recent evidence may not justify optimism in regard to the future of the Sudan. It is, at all events, less pessimistic than that which caused the Governor-General of the Sudan to declare that : "We shall have to regard the Gezira scheme as on the whole a liability to be liquidated by annual subsidies." The unknown quantity which, therefore, now dominates the problem is z , that is to say, the present outlook for the future of the Gezira project. It is the "game".

Is it worth the "candle"?

It is not improbable that the legitimate desire of the British Foreign Office to safeguard "the security of the communications of the British Empire in Egypt" and other circumstances, may at some future date cause Downing Street to consider the advisability of reopening the Anglo-Egyptian "conversations". Should such a step be contemplated, it may not be amiss to call attention to the fact that it is generally believed at Cairo that His

Majesty, King Fuad, is most desirous of obtaining for his country complete independence by means of a Treaty of friendship with England.

The present sovereign of Egypt is a discerning statesman. He is a constitutional monarch. But when the Near East speaks of a constitutional ruler it does not necessarily envisage an effaced Chief of State. It has, rather, in mind an occupant of a throne who participates with his Ministers in shaping the polity of the State. This is insisted upon because constitutionalism in the Levant, while meaning that the old days of autocracy are over, implies that their place has been taken by co-operation between Crown and nation. In other words, the fact that King Fuad is believed to be prepared to sign a treaty of amity with England is a factor of great moment in Anglo-Egyptian relations.

But the whole problem is dominated, in the last analysis, by that unknown quantity x and by the fact that the British taxpayer has invested his money in the Sudan. This is the "game". Is it worth the candle?

Charles George Gordon said that it was not. His martyrdom lends striking emphasis to his words. They have already been cited in these pages. We shall repeat them. They were put into the form of a Memorandum sent to Lord Granville on 22nd January, 1884. They read :

"The Sudan is a useless possession, ever was or ever will be so."

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